

Living Belfast:  
Representations of the City in Glenn Patterson's Novels

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## **Introduction: Glenn Patterson's Belfast**

The city always speaks, and with many voices. It has been a powerful image in literature since literature began. (Pike ix)

Burton Pike addresses a longstanding fascination with urbanity, with its vibrancy and multiplicity that also form the heart of this thesis. It deals with the perception of city space in general and looks at the literary representation of one city in particular. Belfast is home to just over a quarter of a million people, and one of them is Glenn Patterson. The novelist's prose revolves around his hometown. He considers the material, social and historical dimensions of the urban, establishing thus a powerful and multivoiced image of Belfast, a city that has suffered from monolithic representation for a long time.

In an international context the numbers game makes Belfast a comparatively small and insignificant urban centre. In a more localized context however, Belfast constitutes the second largest city on the island of Ireland. It is home to a national legislative body and capital of the country of Northern Ireland. This political role and the civil unrest connected to it are the reasons Belfast has become disproportionally famous to a global audience over the course of the last forty years. The civil war that has claimed more than 3000 lives has dominated international media coverage of the city and shaped a one-sided image of it. The Troubles, as this civil war is named euphemistically but to common acceptance, erupted in the late 1960s against a background of a century-long history of social discord between members of the Catholic and Protestant faiths.<sup>1</sup> What initially began as a protest for civil rights, as Catholics of Northern Ireland, inspired by the developments in the United States of America in the 1960s, took to the streets to demand better housing, equal job opportunities and the end of gerrymandering, soon erupted into violent fighting.<sup>2</sup> In Belfast riots and street fighting became

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<sup>1</sup> While used as a categorisation faith has actually very little to do with the conflict that has been inscribed with political views and social issues. Patterson scatters comments on this matter throughout his prose.

<sup>2</sup> As this thesis is a literary analysis first and foremost, I would like to keep the historical background relatively brief. With *Making Sense of the Troubles* David McKittrick and David McVea have written one of many books that deals with the topic in great detail and gives background information on the Troubles.

common occurrences and international media coverage projected pictures of a city at war. Working-class districts in particular were barricaded. Police and army moved in the streets heavily armed. So-called peace lines were erected at interfaces, cutting neighbourhoods off from each other. Bombing campaigns in the 1970s and 80s destroyed not only many lives but also many buildings in the city. Others were adorned with politically loaded murals. For a long time the Troubles constituted the main news out of Belfast, and representations of the city, not only journalistic but also literary ones, focused on this aspect of it. “Belfast was only big because Belfast was bad” (McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* 13).

But Belfast also shares universal urban characteristics with cities across the world. They are all complex and heterogeneous, alive with their inhabitants and changing with them. One narrative alone does not suffice to tell their stories. Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* defines postmodernity via its incredulity towards the grand narratives, and the city as a postmodern space mirrors this incredulity. One story is not enough to describe a city with many voices. Rather it is established through an abundance of micronarratives. The Troubles constitute only one of Belfast’s stories, but they do not suffice to represent the city. Glenn Patterson’s prose has been instrumental in establishing Belfast as a postmodern complexity in Northern Irish literature. In his seven novels to date, his journalistic writing and one book of nonfiction he has established himself as an inherently urban writer on the one hand and a modern-day chronicler of Belfast on the other hand. His texts provide kaleidoscopic views of the city in which he emphasises its multiplicity. This thesis delineates how Glenn Patterson constructs the city threefold, on a material, social and historical level. In connecting these three dimensions, he establishes Belfast as a multifaceted complex. In highlighting their flexibility, he addresses the city’s propensity for change and emphasises this as one of its most important characteristics. Patterson’s image of Belfast does not aim for completeness, but shows the city as a permanently developing network of interconnections. In Northern Irish literature in general the (still) prevailing trope of the Troubles tends to impose an image of stagnation and paralysis onto Belfast, projecting a one-dimensional picture of the city. Patterson’s emphases however counter the idea of

one all-encompassing narrative. Laura Pelschiar describes his texts as a “macro-container of stories” (“The City as Text” 184), in which many voices, enhanced by multi-perspective narration, democratically coexist. In introducing new perspectives, Patterson continuously and repeatedly deconstructs binary oppositions that enforce an atmosphere of stagnation and make up the cognitive mindset that has bolstered the Troubles. A myriad of individual stories acts against the overpowering dominance of the Troubles. Therefore Patterson’s books are often classified beyond the typical Troubles novels<sup>3</sup> (Patten, “Fiction in Conflict” 146), despite the inclusion of the conflict and references to it in every one of his texts. He himself perceives his texts as coming out of a society in conflict, but rather than describing violence immediately, he addresses how a society copes with the effects of such violence: The novels are “all concerned with the ramifications of violence, rather than engaged in acts of violence themselves. I am interested in how people in societies where violence like that occurs conduct their lives” (Magennis 156). The Troubles feature both directly and indirectly in Patterson’s novels; however, the important thing to stress is that they do not become overbearing in his narratives, and neither do they become dominant in the representation of Belfast as an urban centre.

The focus on urbanity pervades Patterson’s entire body of work, and while two of his novels, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (1995) and *The Third Party* (2007), leave Northern Ireland behind, they still feature highly urban settings and frequent references to Belfast. Thus from the time his first book, *Burning Your Own* (1989), which is set in a housing estate in the south of Belfast, was published, Patterson has remained preoccupied with the urban in general and Belfast in particular. Patrick Hicks has called it his “center of creative gravity” (117), comparing Patterson’s fixation on Belfast to that of Joyce on Dublin. In his work Patterson has established himself as Northern Ireland’s foremost urban novelist and contemporary portraitist of his hometown. No other Belfast writer

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Bradford for example has advanced the view that Patterson’s fifth novel *Number 5*, “comes close to testing the hypothesis [...]: that it is impossible to write a novel about Northern Ireland that is not preoccupied with the Troubles. [...] [H]e manages to instil into the sheer ordinariness of his characters something far more admirable than the litanies of bloody heroism and strident victimhood that still overcrowds our perception of Ulster” (237).

has included the city in his stories to such an extent and with such intensity as Glenn Patterson.

While I will address all of Patterson's novels at some point in this thesis in order to highlight his unique position within the Northern Irish literary tradition, my main analysis revolves around four novels, which show the literary construction of the city on three levels most clearly. All of them are set in Belfast, and all of them represent the city in great detail and particularity, as short plot summaries of each will show.

In *Fat Lad* (1992) Drew Linden moves back to his hometown Belfast, to take on the position of assistant manager at a successful bookstore chain. Nine years ago the 18-year-old left "a city dying on its feet" (FL 5),<sup>4</sup> sickened by the hate-fuelled conflict that dominated and hampered urban life. When he returns, Drew finds a city that is in the process of reinventing itself. It changes daily, with new developments and businesses springing up throughout its centre. Slowly Drew reacquaints himself with this altered version of Belfast, interlacing his perspectives with memories of how it used to be. During this process he is helped by Kay, a young and self-confident businesswoman, with whom he starts an affair, while his girlfriend Melanie remains in England. Kay represents the newly positive and successful Belfast and shows great pride in her home town. Her half-sister Anna on the other hand, whom Drew meets and eventually also sleeps with, exhibits considerably less enthusiastic feelings towards the city, which stem from past experiences. She now runs a boutique in Dublin, but Anna used to live in Belfast with her partner Connor. As a couple from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds the two experienced a lot of prejudice and social cruelty in Belfast, until Connor was killed in an accident related to the Troubles. While the two women already present alternate versions of the city, the Linden family offers further ones. Stories and reminiscences told from the perspectives of Drew's sister Ellen, his father, aunt and grandmother turn the novel into a kaleidoscope of narratives. They provide snapshots of city life in the past and closely link Drew's

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<sup>4</sup> I abbreviate the names of Patterson's novels in parenthetical citation. Throughout the thesis 'FL' stands for *Fat Lad*, 'TI' for *The International*, 'N5' for *Number 5*, 'TWW' for *That Which Was*, 'BYO' for *Burning Your Own*, 'BN' for *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* and 'TTP' for *The Third Party*.

family history with that of Belfast, while focusing on individual experiences. Granny Linden and her husband live in a Protestant working-class district, raising four children and witnessing the political and economic situation steadily deteriorating. Drew's father, like his son after him, tried his luck in England before returning to his the city of his birth with his wife and first child Ellen. Ellen absolutely hates Belfast when she first comes to live there but grows up to regard it as her home. Confronted with the choice of emigration when the Troubles erupt, Ellen chooses to stay and starts a family, while Drew flees the city at the first opportunity. He starts university in England and falls in with a group of expatriates. Most noticeably amongst them is Hugh McManus, who loathes Northern Ireland and the political stalemate during the late 1970s and 1980s with a vengeance. Nevertheless, as a solicitor Hugh elects to defend a Catholic priest associated with the Troubles and promptly gets murdered over it. Like Hugh, Drew cannot escape the influence of his home, and thus his return and his intensive involvement both with Belfast and his relatives appear as logical consequence of his own and his family's history.

*The International* (1999) is set on a Saturday in January of 1967, focusing on a single day in The International Hotel. First-person narrator Danny, who works as a barman in The International's Blue Bar, assembles stories of customers, staff and guests into a collage of narratives. He portrays the hotel as a microcosm of the city and experiences the day as a frantic sequence of events, steadily gathering in momentum until the Blue Bar is heaving with punters. Together with his colleagues Jamesie and Hugh he works the bar and both witnesses and engages in countless social interactions. He falls in love twice, first with Ingrid, then with Stanley, and, portraying himself as a sexually adventurous person, he includes recollections of former homo- and heterosexual encounters he has had both in and outside the hotel. As a narrator Danny remains highly unreliable throughout the novel, because he frequently admits to forgetting, omitting and changing details. He leaves stories only to pick them up again at a later stage and scatters information on the various characters throughout the text. Thus the reader learns of Stanley's upbringing in a working-class home and his fascination with puppetry. With the creation of Rab and Jem, two distinctly

Belfast puppets, Stanley hopes to become successful on a national level, but quickly learns the limit of the city's appeal. He comes to drown his sorrows in the Blue Bar, as does Ingrid, who tries to forget about her broken engagement and swears off men forever. Stanley's and Ingrid's stories intermingle with countless others. Businessman Clive, for example, comes to The International to close a business deal with a colleague from Dublin; the Vances, an American couple, spend their holidays in Ireland; and the aging football star Ted Connolly lashes out against the political climate that emerges in the country. Set exactly one day before the inaugural meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, *The International* portrays Belfast at a time in which it is not yet riddled by sectarian violence. Instead Patterson was inspired by a quote which described the city's atmosphere of the late 1960s as a "faint feeling of lightness in the air" and tried to explore "ways of reading that particular time forward from the moment rather than looking back at on it" ("Writing the Troubles" 18). However, Danny also makes a number of allusions to the war that will erupt in the following decades and includes details in the narratives that already hint towards civil unrest. IRA activities and Ian Paisley's rhetoric are mentioned as well as sectarian sentiments. Most importantly, Danny comes to work in The International as Peter Ward's successor. Peter is 17 years old when he is shot in a bar in Malvern Street because of his religion. One of the first murders of the impending Troubles, the boy's fate leaves a lasting impression not only on Danny but all the staff of The International Hotel and foreshadows the city's dark future.

*Number 5* (2003) tells the stories of the occupants of one house in Belfast throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Number 5 is part of a suburban estate that develops in the late 1950s on the very outskirts of the city. When the house comes on the market, it is bought by Stella and Harry Falloon. The first episode of the novel focuses on the first-person narrator Stella, who struggles to come to terms with married life and the monotony of the days at home as a housewife. She resents the isolated location of the suburb and the lack of privacy that is caused by the narrow layout of the estate. Her attempts to break out of her small-scale life remain unsuccessful, and she finally suffers a nervous breakdown. In the end the Falloons, together with their baby daughter Peggy, emigrate to



Australia, and Number 5 is bought by Rodney and Margaret McGovern. The middle-aged couple moves to Belfast to enjoy the perks of the city, but Rodney, who narrates this episode, soon realizes that the advent of the Troubles has put a stop to urban cultural life. He perceives the atmosphere in the city, or more specifically the area around the estate, as disconcerting. In political discussions he is often at loggerheads with his Hungarian neighbour András Hideg. The McGoverns move back into the country in the middle of the 1970s. They are succeeded by the Tans, a Chinese family with three teenage children. The only boy acts as first-person narrator in the third episode of the novel. He depicts repeated racist incidents against his family but also establishes Belfast society as multi-ethnic. Together with his best friend he roams the streets of the estates, challenges sectarian graffiti and at one point even fakes paramilitary hate mail in order to avoid a family confrontation. Unlike Rodney the young Tan accepts the political situation as a given and is more preoccupied with the task of carving a niche for him and his family in Belfast society than with political discussion. In the late 1980s the Tans sell Number 5 to the Eliots. First-person narrator Catriona moves into the house with her husband and two children. By this time the estate has become securely incorporated into the city complex, and the violence is slowly abating to make way for capitalist development. Although Catriona observes these processes, she remains mainly occupied with her family, as first her teenage daughter, then her son and later on even her husband rediscover their faith. To Catriona's discomfort religious meetings occur in her home, until a minor art scandal caused by the community centre she works in offends the neighbourhood. Catriona and her newly de-converted family move out of Number 5 nine years after they bought it. Finally Mel and Tony see the new millennium and a modern city in the house. First-person narrator Mel moves in with Tony after she has been left by her boyfriend, and the two build their own business together. While the house changes through all occupants, Mel and Tony renovate and redecorate it extensively. Peggy, Stella's now grown-up daughter, who traces her roots and turns up on Number 5's doorstep one day, would have not been able to recognise the home of her early childhood, even if she could have remembered. Her appearance links the novel's last episode with the first one. Additionally, Ivy

Moore serves as a constant throughout all five narratives. She lives opposite Number 5 for over five decades, witnessing all transformations of the house and the estate and accompanying five different sets of occupants.

In *That Which Was* (2004) Presbyterian minister Ken Avery looks after a congregation in East Belfast. After initial scepticism from some longstanding members who disagree with some of Avery's more liberal viewpoints, he is beginning to settle in, and his wife is expecting their second baby. The familiar routine of life and his daily duties is broken by a stranger, who comes to Avery to make a confession. Larry, as the man calls himself, is convinced to have committed a politically motivated murder during the Troubles. He is also convinced that somebody has meddled with his brain, to make him forget the crime, and he asks for Avery's help in piecing the fragments of memories back together. Avery is thrown off balance by this extreme claim, and, although highly sceptical as to whether Larry tells the truth, he agrees to meet the man again. The investigations Avery makes himself paint a two-sided picture of Larry. On the one hand his former girlfriend and brother call him mentally unstable, on the other hand Larry's memories tally with other records of the time. Little by little Avery is roped into Larry's story and his conspiracy theories and becomes preoccupied with them. As a result he gets into trouble not only with his wife but also with his congregation. He accidentally omits the national anthem from the memorial service on Remembrance Day, thus breaking a strictly observed and highly sensitive tradition. Parts of East Belfast still subscribe to old sectarian convictions, as an incident at a cross-community football tournament underlines. A little boy gets injured on Avery's watch and some people are quick to accuse the minister of favouritism towards the Catholic community. Even the derogative graffito "Fenian lover" is sprayed onto the church wall. Furthermore, a loyalist feud that has erupted on the Shankill Road threatens to spread into East Belfast and to engulf Avery's congregation. The city Avery travels daily in the course of his work shows many faces. On the one hand developments point the way towards a modern metropolis. On the other hand old prejudices still reign supreme and shape social life in Belfast. "The novel captures the sense of political insecurity that permeates post-ceasefire Belfast" (Lehner 512). Past events carry

repercussions into the present, whether this is the official enquiry on the events of Bloody Sunday or a single minister's uncertainty as to who murdered two people in a bar 20 years ago. Larry's story, his paranoia and his eventual death impress the seriousness of these repercussions but also show that the past can never be uncontested, as memory must always be subjective.

*Fat Lad*, *The International*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* elevate Belfast to a character in its own right and clearly show Patterson's portrayal of the city in material, social and historical terms. This threefold order, which structures the thesis, draws on ideas of spatiality that have become prominent in the last couple of decades. In the following chapter, called "Spatial Perspectives," I address theoretical ideas that corroborate my understanding of Patterson's Belfast. Here the spatial turn, which has seen an increased engagement with the concepts of space and place not only in literature but a number of academic fields, provides valuable input. For my purposes I draw mainly on the writings of two prominent proponents of the spatial turn. Edward W. Soja suggests a trialectics of being that includes spatiality, historicity and sociality. In his writing these three components are equally important and influence each other. He furthermore believes in the importance of deconstructing existing binarisms in order to invite new meaning. Doreen Massey propounds similar ideas when she speaks of dichotomous dualisms that need to be undermined. She too is of the opinion that a dualistic world view forecloses multiplicity. Additionally Massey advances the presupposition that space as a process is shaped not only by its physical materiality but also by the people populating it, and that it always has a historical dimension. These concepts lend themselves very well to an application of Patterson's novels for several reasons. Firstly, prose literature in general must be preoccupied with the spatial, as the setting forms an integral part of a narrative. Secondly, the urban, which plays a major role in all of Patterson's texts, constitutes one of the most complex and multi-layered spaces. Thirdly these ideas have special resonance in (Northern) Irish prose, which since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has embraced an anti-essentialist and anti-national perspective – a trend in which Patterson was and still is one of the leading figures. A short delineation of the (Northern) Irish literary tradition in "Spatial Perspectives" shows as much.

After establishing the theoretical foundation of the thesis, I concentrate on Patterson's four aforementioned novels in my main analysis. But rather than dealing with them one after the other, I have opted to structure the analysis by focusing on the material, social and historical representations of Belfast in the novels in turn, jumping between the primary texts where necessary. In doing so, I want to draw attention to the fact that all three dimensions are very much present in Patterson's novels and that clear parallels between them exist.

I begin by expounding on the idea of space with regard to its most immediate meaning that occurs in the novels. On one level, the textual city is defined through a description of its very materiality. The physical space of the city comprises houses and streets, public as well as private places. Even the lay of the land itself is addressed repeatedly. On the one hand the urban presents an unmanageable maze; on the other hand it zooms in on the labyrinth and focuses on small and personal units. Central places of Belfast but also suburban neighbourhoods form the stages for Patterson's novels, and so a myriad of physical spaces come together to create a city that shows many faces. Encompassing them all simultaneously and forming connections between them, it constitutes a heterogeneous and ever-changing landscape.

This physical space is in turn determined by the people who occupy it. Space always directly relates to one or more subjects. The novels display this interdependence in the subjects' and thus the characters' actions and behaviour, their discourse and the networks they form. As personal stories intermingle and meet, a social space is established that constitutes an important component of the textual city. These stories form the imaginative heart and soul of the city. Without its social dimension, the urban space remains an empty shell. The city and its inhabitants, the place and its social substance enter a mutually constitutive relationship with each other in which either part is a necessary condition for the other in the production of meaning. "[T]he city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it" (Barthes 195). Patterson pays tribute to this idea of the city that has become human. The narratives emphasise the individual but are always also entwined with countless others within the urban community, as he closely

portrays the social make-up of the city and the ways it shifts during time. Concepts of class, gender and ethnicity are addressed and applied to characters, but never too rigorously.

Both physical and social space relate to the temporal dimension that becomes apparent in the novel above all through the changes the two dimensions undergo. Whether set on a single day, like *The International*, or spanning the best part of a century, like *Number 5*, Patterson's novels always encompass a historical dimension. The city's history involuntarily influences its character and invariably colours the image the texts paint of it, highlighting its propensity for constant change. Patterson includes both material and social developments in his representation of the city's historicity. On a material level he pays close attention to the transformation of Belfast from a provincial capital to a modern city. He acknowledges the considerable influence of capitalism and is attuned to the dynamics between the global and the local. In his texts the city not only constitutes a container of narratives but also a container of times, as past and present coexist in urban architecture. On a social level changing gender roles and issues of morality play into the narratives. Additionally, Patterson explores the faultlines between individual and communal history.

The opposition between the individual and the communal constitutes only one of many that Patterson addresses and deconstructs in his novels. Throughout the chapters on the material, social and historical representations I point out numerous occasions in which he writes against a dualistic structure and challenges seeming opposites in order to make space for alternatives – the most obvious binarism being the irreconcilable differentiation between Republican Catholics and Loyalist Protestants that is said to dominate Northern Irish society. The other major technique Patterson uses to introduce alternative viewpoints is a polyvocal narration. Almost all his novels shift their narrative perspective at one point or another and incorporate a number of personal stories. Thus various versions of reality and also various representations of Belfast can exist alongside each other, and multiplicity becomes a defining aspect of Patterson's imagination.

Just how distinct this imagination of Belfast is, I show in the chapter "A Comparative Perspective". There, I contextualise Patterson's body of work in

relation to other prose representations of Belfast. This chapter can be seen as a continuation of the paragraphs devoted to the Northern Irish literary tradition in “Spatial Perspectives”. But rather than extending this first general delineation of the Northern Irish novel, I focus on three particular texts that are exemplary of different eras and developments, and compare their representations of Belfast to those in Patterson’s novels, as delineated in detail in the main analysis. In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* Brian Moore creates a provincial and backward place, riddled with bigotry and thus conjures up a common image of Belfast at the time of the novel’s publication in 1965. Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street* (1996) on the other hand portrays Belfast as vibrant, humane, and much more than the site of the Troubles. In his determination to represent his hometown as a heterogeneous and lovable place McLiam Wilson resembles Patterson closely. The writers know each other well, and have published two of the most positively connoted novels set in Belfast for a long time within just a few of years of each other, McLiam Wilson having supposedly said “That’s the one to beat. That’s what I’ve got to do next” (Hicks 118) after first reading *Fat Lad*. Finally David Park’s *The Truth Commissioner* (2008) is an example of a post-ceasefire novel that deals with the aftermath of the Troubles and revisits the political conflict from the perspective of the precarious peace of the new millennium. Park’s Belfast in turn has a lot in common with Moore’s negatively connoted city. He portrays it as a place stuck in its own past, forever tainted by the events it longs to forget.

This comparative perspective establishes Patterson as the only writer in Northern Ireland who is continuously preoccupied with an urban theme and who portrays Belfast as a heterogeneous and changing city of positive multiplicity. My main analysis deals extensively with *Fat Lad*, *The International*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was*. The conclusion includes short discussions of Patterson’s remaining novels *Burning Your Own*, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* and *The Third Party*, in order to show that this holds true for his entire body of work.

Thus this thesis is the first monograph to engage with Glenn Patterson’s texts as the main focal point and to incorporate his novelistic body of work in its entirety. Furthermore, while the idea of space as a process and its close

relationship with both time and the social has taken a hold in recent years, no book-length publication has yet dealt with it in relation to the Northern Irish novel in general, or Patterson's prose in particular. However, two recent publications have taken up relational and active concepts of space and applied it to poetry from Northern Ireland. Both Neal Alexander in *Ciaran Carson. Space, Place, Writing* (2010) and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews in *Writing Home. Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland 1968-2008* (2008) have provided valuable input for this thesis. Patterson himself acknowledges Ciaran Carson as an important influence, and his writing shows many parallels to Carson's poetry. "Carson's vision of the city as 'never finalised' as 'constantly redrawing itself, constantly rewriting itself' is one that would increasingly be shared by the novelist, Glenn Patterson" (Parker, *Northern Irish Literature* 127).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly some of Neal's observations also apply to the younger man's novels, particularly when he makes out the city as an entity determined by its spatiality, sociality and historicity (25). Kennedy-Andrews investigates how Northern Irish poets, "their writing of place, and our understanding of that writing, [have] been affected by issues raised by contemporary developments in ecocriticism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, feminism and, most of all, by new theories of place and spatiality" (3). He observes a shift away from the rootedness of home and towards characteristics such as mobility, hybridity and change (9), keywords that also apply to the representation of Patterson's hometown in his texts.

Patterson's writing itself has received critical attention throughout the quarter of a century of his writing career. *Fat Lad* and *The International* especially have attracted academic discussion, but most of his other novels have regularly come into focus too. Only *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* and *The Third Party* have hardly been written about. While the lack of attention to the latter might be explained by its quite recent publishing date, the reason for the neglect of the former lies probably in the unconventional setting and abstract concerns. Michael Parker calls *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* "an ambitious, though perhaps not wholly successful attempt to extend the range of

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<sup>5</sup> Francesca Bovone also picks up on these parallels in her essay "Glenn Patterson and Ciaran Carson: The New Northern Irish Literature".

[Patterson's] imaginative territory and indeed that of the Irish novel" ("Books of Hours" 14). Overall, Patterson's leading role in a much hailed new generation of writers, whose literary output and accomplishments I address after having outlined the theoretical basis of the thesis, has assured him an entry in a number of surveys and essay collections of Irish, Northern Irish and British literature. The list includes *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, *After Yeats and Joyce. Reading Modern Irish Literature*, *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, *Representing the Troubles. Texts and Images, 1970-2000*, *Modern Irish Writers and the Wars*, *Contemporary British Fiction. Themes, Tropes, Theories*, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*, *Northern Irish Literature, 1975-2006*, *Writers and Protestantism in the North of Ireland*, *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction*, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* and *Irish Fiction Since the 1960s: A Collection of Critical Essays*.<sup>6</sup>

Many of these publications address Patterson's attention to local detail, the humanity present in his novels and the narrative focus on a plethora of stories. However, none of them connect these characteristics to the relational understanding of spatiality that lies at the heart of this thesis, or delineate Patterson's construction of the urban in greater detail. The academic contributions in the surveys and other publications do not exceed essay lengths, some are as short as a paragraph. Additionally Patterson's work is mostly analysed in the context of Northern Irish literature and in comparison to that of other writers. His Protestant background often plays into these analyses, and is most explicitly made topical in Barry Sloan's *Writers and Protestantism in the North of Ireland* (using the example of *Burning Your Own*) and in John Goodby's "Reading Protestant Writing."<sup>7</sup> With the exception of reviews of his books only few essays focus on

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<sup>6</sup> The complete biographical data can be found in the list of works cited.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Jeffers argues in connection to this that Protestant writing in general paints a better picture of the Northern Irish capital than does Catholic writing. "[I]t should be noted that more positive views of Belfast tend to come from Protestant-centered narratives, such as Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* (1992) or McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street* (1996)" (65). However, she immediately negates her own argument by listing *Eureka Street*, which tells not only Protestant Chuckie's story but also that of his friend Jake, who is a Catholic. Jake's love for Belfast is much more pronounced in the novel than Chuckie's affinity to the city. (I analyse the representation of



Patterson's writing exclusively. In "Books of Hours: The Fiction of Glenn Patterson" Michael Parker explores Patterson's preoccupation with the tension between private and national histories in his first three novels, the nation of course being a highly contested term within a Northern Irish context. In "On Not Safeguarding the Cultural Heritage. Glenn Patterson's *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*" Sarah Brouillette answers her question on how "writers interpret and perform their own roles in the creation of Northern Irish heritage" (321) in an analysis of Patterson's third novel – one of the few academic discussions of it.

Amongst the comparative publications of essay length two contributors stand out. Eamonn Hughes has published a number of articles and book chapters on Northern Irish literature, many of which also refer to the work of Glenn Patterson. His ideas on the representation of Belfast are quoted regularly, this thesis included. Hughes dissects images of the urban in Northern Irish literature. In "Belfastards and Derriers" he pits not only literary creations of the two biggest Northern Irish cities against each other, but also addresses the dichotomies between rural and urban imaginations. His introduction to *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* presents the country as "a modern place with the pluralities, discontents, and linkages appropriate to a modern place" ("Northern Ireland – Border Country" 3). This representation does not feature in so-called 'Troubles trash.' In "'Town of Shadows': Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction" Hughes admonishes the dominance of such books, which take advantage of the city as a dark canvas on which to unfold their murderous stories. On a similar note Eve Patten in "Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists" lashes out against the same type of literature. In accordance with Hughes ("Town of Shadows" 155) she sees Patterson, together with Robert McLiam Wilson and Colin Bateman, as members of a new generation of novelists who write against such a simplification of Belfast and produce fiction that represents Belfast as positively heterogeneous. Their dualistic viewpoint as emigrants who have returned, insiders and outsiders at the same time, enables them to approach Belfast's urbanity from a fresh perspective. Not only Patten's argument has

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Belfast in *Eureka Street* in more detail in the chapter "Comparative Perspectives".) Moreover, McLiam Wilson himself is a Catholic.

proved highly influential but also her pairing of writers. Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street* is the book Glenn Patterson's novels, especially *Fat Lad*, are by far most often compared with.<sup>8</sup> The chapter "A Comparative Perspective" illustrates why.

The monographs that incorporate Patterson's work into their analyses include Elmer Kennedy-Andrews' *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (De-)Constructing the North* and Laura Pelaschiar's *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland*. Kennedy-Andrews addresses the fiction of the new generation of writers Patten makes out in her essay and attributes it with a postmodern humanism. According to him, this new fiction eschews traditional binaries and explores new identities, embracing difference and pluralism. In *(De-)Constructing the North* Kennedy-Andrews includes analyses of *Burning Your Own*, *Fat Lad* and *The International*, pointing towards the texts' ability to go beyond a binary understanding of community to include a myriad of narratives that point towards multiplicity. Laura Pelaschiar in her monograph, published in 1998, takes a look at the "imaginative perception and fictional representation of Northern Ireland in the Northern Irish novels which have been written over the last thirty years" (11). Like Kennedy-Andrews she focuses on a new writing that has incorporated elements of the postmodern. She too stresses the increased existence of multivoiced narratives and a relational perspective which connects a modern Northern Irish experience to that in the rest of Europe. Her analysis of *Fat Lad* focuses on Patterson's determination to represent Belfast in a positive light and as a 'normal' city just like it can be found everywhere in Europe. Very recently Caroline Magennis has considered Patterson's writing from a different angle. Her monograph *Sons of Ulster. Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel* (2010) applies theories

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander has written his MA dissertation at Queen's University Belfast, which is held in Special Collections in the University Library, on the topic of '*A Babel of Prose*': *Representations of Belfast in the Novels of Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson*, before broadening his topic for his PhD dissertation '*A Fount of Broken Type*': *Representations of Belfast in Prose* to encompass a number of novels from different writers. The relational concept of space has entered his work with the shift of focus to poetry, especially Ciaran Carson. Richard Kirkland in *Identity Parades. Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* devotes a chapter to *Fat Lad* and *Eureka Street* and has contributed a chapter to *Contemporary British Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories* on Patterson and McLiam Wilson.

of gender to the works of Eoin McNamee, Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson. In it she traces the progression of Patterson's novels from "tales of young boys (*Burning Your Own*) and promiscuous young men (*Fat Lad* [and *The International*]) to a domestic fiction (*Number 5*) and the story of a holy father (*That Which Was*)" (141) and pays attention to the ways his image of masculinity has shifted throughout these narratives.

A development within Patterson's body of work also becomes evident in this thesis, albeit with the focus on the representation of the city and the implementation of a relational concept of spatiality in the novels, which I explain further in the following.

## **Spatial Perspectives**

In recent years the cultural debate around the so-called spatial turn has provided new and dynamic perspectives on spatiality, which lend themselves very well to an analysis of the literary urbanity that Glenn Patterson creates in his novels. At its most general, the spatial turn denotes an intensive engagement with the concepts of space and place, as well as an attempt, or rather attempts, to redefine these terms with regard to their complexity and to their relationships with other concepts. Approaches are varied and diversified, the spatial turn having become an important topic not only in cultural criticism but also in a number of other disciplines. It originated in geography and has influenced, among other fields, the social sciences, philosophy, history and literary studies. This multidisciplinary impact of the spatial turn can itself be interpreted as an indication of a heightened awareness of interconnections and a relational worldview that permeates the new definitions of spatiality. A comprehensive overview of the various approaches would go beyond the scope of this thesis and would not be conducive to its purpose. Therefore I will structure this chapter on spatial theory around central themes of two prominent proponents of the spatial turn. The geographer Edward W. Soja and the social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey have both published widely on the subject and have formulated ideas that not only relate closely to some major themes of the spatial turn but also resonate strongly with the construction and representation of space in Glenn Patterson's novels. Broadly speaking, they argue for a re-evaluation of the concept of space and a relational definition that puts the spatial into context with the social as well as the temporal, interconnecting the three dimensions. Within such considerations space becomes an "event" (Alexander, *Space, Place, Writing* 26) in itself. Soja and Massey argue against the construction of exclusive opposites and advance a dialectical understanding of the terms in question. This ties in again with the relational definitions of spatiality propounded by them as well as other contributors of the spatial turn and exhibits the influence of post-structuralist ideas.

Soja's concept of Thirdspace, which he describes in his book of the same title, is not concerned with the literary representation of space per se.

Nevertheless, I consider many of its elements to be useful tools for my literary analysis. This is surely helped by the fact that Soja addresses theoretical ideas of spatiality that are generally applicable outside his own academic discipline. As the human geographer himself remarks, Thirdspace constitutes a “purposefully tentative and flexible term” (*Thirdspace* 2) that encompasses a variety of meanings and can stretch in many directions. I want to make use of this flexibility in my appraisal of two major aspects of the concept.

Firstly, Thirdspace, a combination of First- and Secondspace, and thus, most generally speaking, of the real and the imagined, carries within itself an invitation to a relentless ‘thirling-as-Othering’ (*Thirdspace* 5) of terms. Besides its Derridean aspects, the practice is inspired by the writings of Henri Lefebvre, as are many others of Soja’s ideas. It entails a blurring of exclusive binarisms and an opening up towards new and ever-flexible meaning.

Secondly, Soja speaks of a trialectics of spatiality, historicity and sociality that he regards as a vital formation for the postmodern ontological essence.<sup>9</sup> He does not attempt to isolate the three concepts from each other, but stresses their importance as an interdependent unity. This relational viewpoint remains central throughout *Thirdspace*. Space is no longer seen as an empty container, but as constituted by, as well as constitutive of, social action and relationships on the one hand and as influenced by, and influential of, the specifics of time on the other hand.

Doreen Massey explicitly pays attention to “the way we imagine space” (*For Space* 18). Arguing from a feminist viewpoint, she draws many parallels between the ways the concepts of space and place and that of gender are perceived in her work, while Soja limits this aspect of spatiality to one chapter in

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<sup>9</sup> Soja recapitulates this claim in publications of the present decade, showing the lasting and pervasive influence of a relational space in academic thinking, and his continued commitment to the trialectics: “Dieses Gleichgewicht ist das Ziel: Wir müssen das Räumliche, das Soziale und das Historische als grundlegend gleichwertige kritische Perspektiven auf unser Sein, unser Leben, ja auf alles verstehen” (“Vom „Zeitgeist“ zum „Raumgeist“” 246). Massey’s history of publications indicates a similarly consistent preoccupation with her ideas of spatiality. While *Space, Place and Gender* was published in 1994, her book *For Space* (2005) constitutes a more recent addition to the spatial turn.

*Thirdspace*. In other matters, however, her ideas bear many similarities to those of her colleague.

Firstly, she too argues against the construction of unbridgeable binarisms. Speaking of a “dichotomous dualism” (“Politics and Space/Time” 71), she attacks the idea of defining a term as the negation of another and accuses this practise of producing inflexible orders. This corresponds to Soja’s idea of ‘thirling’ and bears similarities to the way in which Glenn Patterson frequently resorts to the narrative technique of dissolving binarisms in order to represent a flexible and changing urban environment.

Secondly, Massey repeatedly emphasises the relational nature of space. Her essay “Politics and Space/Time” already implies a close connection between the spatial and the temporal in the title, and she expands this notion further within the text. Additionally, Massey presents space as “constituted through social relations and material social practises” (70), completing the picture of a three-way interdependence similar to the one Soja presents in *Thirdspace*. The spatial, the social and the temporal in close connection to each other constitute the three major thematic clusters around which I arrange my analysis.

In elaborating on these spatial theories and contextualising them within the formation of the spatial turn, I lay the theoretical framework for the structure of the literary analysis that constitutes the core of this thesis within the first part of this chapter. In the second part I corroborate these abstract approaches on the interrelatedness of spatiality with ideas that introduce the element of urbanity and deal with its literary representation. I draw on a number of texts on these subjects in order to underscore the relevance of spatiality to literature in general and the novels of Glenn Patterson in particular. In this light their cultural background and environment become important. In the final part of this chapter I roughly trace the role of the city in the history of Irish prose and contextualise Patterson’s work within this specific literary tradition.

## Theories of the Spatial Turn: Soja and Massey

With space featuring centrally in the works of Soja and Massey, they both strive for a new definition of the concept that gives justice to a mode of consciousness which originates in a relational world. This is a concern many advocates of the spatial turn share. In the present “epoch of simultaneity” (Foucault 22) everything seems connected. Isolating fields and topics becomes increasingly difficult. Soja picks up on these notions, speaking of a “growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and their interdependence” (*Thirdspace* 3). This may appear contradictory, seeing as his book *Thirdspace* includes in his title only one of these three axes. However, he makes it clear that he prioritizes the concept of space in his text in order to realign the trialectics of sociality, historicity and spatiality (Soja *Thirdspace*, 44). He does so because he believes that in the past the latter has been neglected in favour of the first two. A short digression into the wider context of the origins and development of the spatial turn shows many of its initiators and contributors imploring the importance of spatiality on the formation of knowledge and being before and alongside Soja. It also sheds light on certain ideas of postmodernity that helped to shape it. Michel Foucault’s essay “On Other Spaces,” initially a lecture given in the late 1960s, which in hindsight has become a central point of reference for the spatial turn, traces the various definitions of space from the Middle Ages well into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “[I]t is necessary to notice that the space which today appears to form the horizon of our concerns, our theory, our systems, is not an innovation; space itself has a history in Western experience” (Foucault 22). Edward Casey argues in a very similar vein. He demonstrates the rich history of space and place in *The Fate of Place*, presenting not only a very detailed analysis of the philosophical approach of the concepts throughout the centuries, but also putting emphasis on the absences and the disregard of the spatial during long stretches of these periods. Accordingly, the spatial turn does not invent space anew; rather it rescues it from remaining in the shadow of the temporal. In the past social events have been assembled within the diachronic order of history. Much emphasis has been put on the continuity of

progress and the advancement of mankind through time, and the spatial has remained rather irrelevant<sup>10</sup>:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. (Foucault 22)

Closely interrelated with this new epoch is the advent of postmodernity that brings with it the “deconstruction of modern knowledge acquisition” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 3) and constitutes a decisive paradigm shift (Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns* 284). The centre becomes decentred, the periphery gains in importance. New aspects of being, or those which have formerly been neglected, arouse interest, and space enters the minds of postmodern thinkers. “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (Foucault 22). Important characteristics of the postmodern favour the return of the spatial. While modernity stands for closure, exclusiveness and unchanging categories (Soja, *Thirdspace* 90-91), postmodernity embraces openness of meaning and concepts such as difference, diversity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, simultaneity and interconnectedness (Soja, *Thirdspace* 83). Fragmentation, rupture, deviation, displacement and discontinuities, all formerly bearers of negative connotations, now carry positive connotations (Soja, *Thirdspace* 117). These attributes play a central role in the discussions that fuel the spatial turn, although it should also be said that the intensity with which this turn is declared varies among academics. Soja, one of the most fervent advocates, speaks of a veritable spatial revolution.<sup>11</sup> Other critics represent more modest viewpoints. The German discussion on the spatial turn in particular exhibits a more toned-down engagement with space, the territorial ideology of the Third Reich having tainted any engagement with space for a long

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<sup>10</sup> See also Schlögel (44) and Bachmann-Medick’s “Fort-Schritte, Gedanken-Gänge, Ab-Stürze” (258-9).

<sup>11</sup> For a critical discussion on Soja’s less dramatic perspective in the early 1990s see Döring and Thielmann (9).



time (Schlögel 12; Hallet and Neumann 10; Fisher and Mennel 16). Recently, German academia has increasingly freed the concept from its negative connotations and begun to attribute it with the central ideas of the spatial turn. Accordingly, Karl Schlögel sees the current discussion and his own contribution to it primarily as a heightened attention towards the spatial: “Ziel war [...] nicht die Verkündung eines neuen Paradigmas. Manchmal ist weniger mehr. In diesem Fall ging es schlicht um die Steigerung von Aufmerksamkeit, um die Erfahrung, daß eine räumlich gesehene Welt reicher, komplexer, mehrdimensionaler ist” (15). A historian himself, Schlögel tries to establish space and place as important factors in historical narration and, in doing so, acknowledges that his discipline especially has for a long time favoured the linear quality of history, highlighting its implications of progress and development. However, this diachronical order does not do justice to today’s experiences of simultaneity and synchronicity. Instead we turn to space in order to be able to grasp such a complexity. “Der Ort hielt den Zusammenhang aufrecht und verlangte geradezu die gedankliche Reproduktion des Nebeneinander, der Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigkeit” (10). In connection to this idea of relatedness, Schlögel also calls for the unity of space, time and action, the latter being an intrinsically social event. “Das vorliegende Buch will herausfinden, was geschieht, wenn man geschichtliche Vorgänge immer auch als räumliche und örtliche denkt und beschreibt. Es nimmt die Einheit von Ort, Zeit und Handlung ernst” (9-10). Concentrating on German literature, Jamie Fisher and Barbara Mennel also consider these dimensions closely related. They write against a prioritisation of time over space but grant them equal influence on social behaviour, actions and interaction: “Things, and especially social relations, unfold in space in a manner similar to (and overlapping with) how they unfold in time and over history. Spatiality becomes a central aspect of the analysis of social relations just as the history of those relations is central to their analysis” (14). Similarly Jude Bloomfield regards place<sup>12</sup> “as the

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<sup>12</sup> While some theorists use the terms *space* and *place* interchangeably, others advocate a clear differentiation between the two. To me the following definitions based on the writings of Lawrence Buell seem most clear-cut and pervasive: space “denotes areal form in the abstract” (147), while place “is succinctly definable as space that is bounded and marked as humanly meaningful through personal attachment, social relations, and physiographic distinctiveness”

context for social relationships and action. As such it is marked by time and history, of memories both personal – such as the memories of childhood and rites of passage – and social – such as those of historical events or recurrent civic rituals” (53). The theoretical debate spawned by and constituting the spatial turn regards space as a complex construct. Fisher and Mennel, Bloomfield and Schlögel in fact echo Soja’s unity of spatiality, historicity and sociality. Their emphasis on a threefold unity brings us full circle and takes us back to the two main concepts that form the foundation for this thesis.

In *Thirdspace* Soja deconstructs the binary polarisation of terms that forestalls any readjustment of meaning. Flexibility and openness towards the new constitute important characteristics of the geographer’s theories. Soja looks beyond binarisms with the aim of enriching their meanings. The term he chooses for this process refers back to the title of the book: Thirdspace is described as a continuation of Firstspace and Secondspace. In this theory Firstspace constitutes the material, real space, concrete and “directly comprehended” (*Thirdspace* 74), while Secondspace represents the space of thoughts, the space of the imaginary. “In its purest form, Secondspace is entirely ideational, made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies” (*Thirdspace* 79). Thirdspace combines these two notions and, at the same time, carries them further towards new meanings. Analogous to it, ‘thirling’ is the verb that describes the act of overcoming two oppositions, their re-evaluation and redefinition. For Soja this process is of special importance in the field of politics, where a ground that encompasses all possibilities is often the only acceptable solution:

I try to open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices. In this critical thirling, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the opposing categories to open new alternatives. (*Thirdspace* 5)

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(145). This differentiation is not central in understanding Bloomfield’s quote, as her statement concerns both related terms. However, the idea of the importance of human presence plays echoes the social dimension I attribute to Glenn Patterson’s urban representation.

The phrase “an-Other set of choices” goes back to Lefebvre, whose exclamation “Il ya toujours l’Autre” (*Thirdspace* 31) can be found at the very heart of the process of ‘thirling.’ Lefebvre understands a binarism to be much more than the sum of its two parts: “When faced with a choice confined to the either / or, Lefebvre creatively resisted by choosing instead an-Other alternative, marked by the openness of both / and also [...], with the ‘also’ reverberating back to disrupt the categorical closures implicit in the either /or logic” (*Thirdspace* 7). The third option always entails elements of both sides, emphasising not the differences that construct a binarism but the similarities that deconstruct it. While Soja speaks specifically of spatial imaginaries, the practice of ‘thirling’ is not restricted to it, but can be applied to all aspects of life. Soja emphasises Lefebvre’s “Il y a toujours l’Autre”, focusing on the ever-present possibility of a redevelopment of meaning.

His statement loudly echoes the postmodern theory of deconstruction and above all Jacques Derrida’s concept of *différance*. This concept, a composite of the verbs *to defer* and *to differ*, dismisses a static structure and entails a constant instability of meaning. Because a word or sign can never be grasped in isolation, but needs to be defined in relation to a potentially infinite number of others along the chain of signifiers, its meaning is constantly postponed or deferred (Derrida 337). Thus, the sign always also carries within itself its opposition, the two ideas that differ most from each other. Every sign always encompasses its opposite within, which is present as a trace. This necessary coexistence of the two extremes must result in the possibility of new meanings. Notions of closure and exclusiveness are negated in favour of an opening up towards new possibilities. In this poststructuralist acknowledgement that signs can only be deciphered with the help of other signs, and never completely or finally, also lies the belief in interconnectedness. Multiple meanings and heterogeneous connotations are embraced, just as displacement and deviation are no longer inscribed with purely negative meaning, instead denoting freedom from prescribed categories. Similarly, Soja deliberately deconstructs existing categorisations, using the process of ‘thirling’ to create postmodern meaning that “does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a

disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization, producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different” (*Thirdspace* 61).

Doreen Massey argues a related point in her writing when she speaks out against a “dichotomous dualism” (“The Politics of Space/Time” 71) that has pervaded Western thinking. Specifically attacking the antipodal juxtaposition of space and time, she shows how closely related these two major theoretical aspects are. She argues against a binary worldview that builds on exclusive opposites and propagates a rigid order. Within the logic of this reasoning, interrelatedness constitutes a key concept for her, and she particularly stresses dependencies of space and time, while also including the social in her discussion. The central connection becomes most explicit in her essay “Politics and Space/Time”. Here, Massey vehemently negates “the view of space which, in one way or another, defines it as stasis, and as utterly opposed to time” (67). In this view the temporal receives heightened attention and is attributed with a number of positively connoted meanings, while space has to take the back seat and remain indistinct. “Over and over again, time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism, while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things” (“Politics and Time/Space” 72). This dichotomy encapsulates an implied hierarchy, in which one term always compares favourably to the other. “For within this kind of conceptualization, only one of the terms (A) is defined positively. The other term (not-A) is conceived in relation to A, and as lacking in A” (“Politics and Time/Space” 72). In order to display the rigidity of meaning this practice entails, Massey likens this hierarchic dualism to the construction of exclusive genders. She equates time with the masculine and posits their supposed opposites beneath them:

[S]pace and the feminine are frequently defined in terms of dichotomies in which each of them is most commonly defined as not-A. There is a whole set of dualism whose terms are commonly aligned with time and space. With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, (‘simple’) reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (“Politics and Time/Space” 73)

The latter grouping of terms of course is frequently not only considered to be spatial but also feminine. With this comparison of two dualistic and hierarchical oppositions as they have been prevalent in Western society, Massey intends to highlight the constricting qualities of such conceptualisation.<sup>13</sup> In accordance with Soja's technique of 'thirling,' she emphasises how the exclusive definitions lead to an "impoverishment" ("Politics and Time/Space" 73) of both terms, when they simply become 'not the other'. In contrast to this, a relational understanding of the supposed opposites opens up possibilities and generates new and more complex meanings. The one always also encapsulates the other, a synthesis comes to be, and again similarities rather than differences are emphasised. Not only the concepts of gender free themselves from their encroaching restrictions and enable new meanings when seen as two symbiotic concepts, each influencing the other, but also the concepts of the spatial and the temporal are enriched by such an understanding. This enables a heterogeneity of narratives that is not possible as long as the domination of time over space supports a singular worldview. Within the temporal order different spaces merge into one grand narrative. Instead of developing a narrative of their own, they merely represent stages in the global history of development. This conceptualisation of time and space goes hand in hand with the assumption that a unified global progression is unavoidable. "The proposition turns geography into history, space into time" (Massey, *For Space* 5). According to Massey, it does not acknowledge spatial differences but sees the localities at different stages in the inevitable narrative of progress instead, disregarding the heterogeneous potential of the concept of space (*For Space* 5). Massey, however, propounds a definition of space that enables openness and a multitude of histories, thus closely linking the spatial with the temporal without prioritizing one over the other. It is her belief that "[t]he definitions of both space and time in themselves must be constructed as the result of interrelations" ("Politics and Time/Space" 77), and that the two concepts cannot be regarded in isolation.

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<sup>13</sup> Intriguingly, Massey also applies this gender simile in *Space, Place and Gender* to the concepts of space and place, equating the former with the masculine and the latter with the feminine. Again she argues for a relational view of two terms, incorporating the concept of space within that of place and vice versa (9).

Massey further expands this interrelatedness to include the social dimension. In her introduction of *Space, Place, and Gender* she describes

space-time as a configuration of social relations within which the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity. [...] Further yet, within this dynamic simultaneity which is space, phenomena may be placed in relationship to one another in such a way that new social effects are provoked. The spatial organization of society, in other words, is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics. (3-4)

Once again, space is assumed to be both constituted by and constitutive of social relations within it. Society shapes the space it occupies in its action and practices, giving it form and definition, while space, vice versa, affects social actions. The influence is mutual and establishes a complex of interdependent relations. Thus space does not remain a passive concept but becomes an event in its own right and within the spatial turn is seen as “an active and fundamental component of social processes” (Alexander, *Space, Place, Writing* 28). No longer an “immobile, inert, ahistorical, and undialectical” container (Alexander, *Space Place Writing* 28), the spatial connects to both the social and the historical and penetrates the realm of politics. Sharing a concern with space on the political level with Soja, Massey’s viewpoint also calls Soja’s most important influence to mind, since Lefebvre was the first to conceive of space as both the product and the producer of social action: “Though a product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it” (*The Production of Space* 85).

Soja adopts this perspective. In *Thirdspace* spatio-temporal relations are now not only regarded as such, but also as defining contributors to sociality and vice versa. Furthermore, time and its progress are made meaningful, made into history through the presence of the social, that is humans interacting within a group. Similarly human interaction defines space. Thus, the spatiality of the city is highly influenced by the sociality and historicity within it. Lefebvre directly relates this intrinsic relationship to the concept of urbanity: “If there is a production of the city, and social relations in the city, it is a production and reproduction of human beings by human beings, rather than a production of

objects. The city has a history; it is the work of a history, that is, of clearly defined people and groups who accomplish this oeuvre, in historical conditions” (*Writings on Cities* 101). For Soja, this interdependent construct constitutes not only a characteristic of the city but an “all-embracing dimension of human life” (*Thirdspace* 10). He elevates the trialectics to an ontological level: “[B]eing in the world is existentially definable as being simultaneously historical, social and spatial” (*Thirdspace* 73). This introduces an element of interconnectedness and simultaneity, but at the same time its flexibility makes it a fragile construct. Soja specifically emphasises the resulting complexity and instability, pointing to key terms of postmodernism. The relationship of spatiality, historicity and sociality “is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, never presentable in permanent constructions” (*Thirdspace* 71). The three variants invariably shift within their arrangement, influencing and altering each other. This notion in turn takes us back to Soja’s negation of antipodal opposites that are closed to alternative meanings and re-evaluations. The democratic and interconnected trialectics of space, time and the social prevents a domination of any of the three variants. Shifts and alterations are welcomed as a liberating force and seen as a sign for the active character of the three dimensions. Both Massey and Soja embrace the possibility for alternative meaning and the interrelated worldview that the rediscovery and redefinition of space brings about.

### **Spatiality in Literature**

These elements of the postmodern world not only play a role in their discipline of geography but are present within the realms of literature. The theoretical thoughts that constitute the spatial turn lend themselves to an application within a literary analysis in several ways. One of the most poignant and simple reasons to connect the ideas of Soja and Massey and their preoccupation with the spatial dimension to literature is the continued emphasis on setting within texts. Since Glenn Patterson’s narratives grant the city so much textual consideration, they especially belong to this category. His novels put forth a multi-layered, heterogeneous and shifting image of Belfast. The textual city in them refuses clear categorisation but comes alive through the relational interplay of the spatial, the social, and the

historical. None of these dimensions would function in isolation, but in combination they work together to form urban life in Patterson's novels. Accordingly, the "image of the city is a figure with profound tones and overtones, a presence and not simply a setting" (Pike 8). It contributes the very fabric of the novels' narratives and constitutes a character of its own right.<sup>14</sup> As becomes evident in his novels, but also in published interviews and non-fiction essays, Patterson has remained preoccupied throughout his writing career with the complex and intriguing spatial phenomenon that is the city. He sees it as his "task [...] to update the fictional map of Belfast" (D'Hoker and Schwall 96), addressing urbanity and its characteristics in all his novels, constructing images of Berlin, Paris and Hiroshima in *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* and *The Third Party*. The progress of his work indicates that, while the need to fervently redraw the map of the city has lessened in recent years, as the peace process has turned into a more sustained development and Belfast has strengthened its place within the community of European and globalised cities, related themes still preoccupy him. Ideas on public places and the social dimension of space, as for example practised in the very traditional Irish pub(lic space), have not only infused the narrative of *The International*, but also play a role in his current work: "I just love the idea of places where you come together. [...] [T]he title of the novel I'm currently working on is the name of a 19th century inn outside Belfast" (Burgess). Thus Glenn Patterson's personal and long-lasting thematic focus on the ideas of space and place is not only exceptional within the Northern Irish literary tradition, it also certainly invites the engagement with recent theoretical discussions on spatiality in relation to his writings.

However, connections exist also on a more general level. Schlögel establishes the interconnectedness and simultaneity of today's world as one reason why space constitutes an indispensable component of any novel:

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<sup>14</sup> The novels constitute city texts – "Stadttexte" as Andreas Mahler calls them: "Dabei verstehe ich unter „Stadttexten“ all jene Texte, in denen die Stadt ein – über referentielle bzw. semantische Rekurrenzen abgestütztes – dominantes Thema ist, also nicht nur Hintergrund, Schauplatz, *setting* für ein anderes dominant verhandeltes Thema, sondern unkürzbarer Bestandteil des Texts" (12).



Es ist wohl kaum möglich, eine Geschichte geradewegs zu erzählen und schrittweise in der Zeit zu entfalten. Und dies deshalb, weil wir nur zu gut darüber Bescheid wissen, was unentwegt und seitwärts über die Linie der Erzählung hinweggeht. Das heißt, wir sind uns darüber im Klaren, daß es keinen Punkt als einen unendlich kleinen Teil einer geraden Linie, als das Zentrum sternförmig zusammenlaufender Linien gibt. Dieses Wissen ist das Ergebnis davon, daß wir unentwegt die Gleichzeitigkeit und die Ausdehnung von Ereignissen und Möglichkeiten in Rechnung stellen. (50)

A diachronic perspective no longer suffices within a postmodern worldview, but must join forces with the synchronic one in order to form a contemporary narration. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *chronotope* presents not only an early example of the application of spatial dimension to the literary text, but it also stands for a relational perspective. The idea denotes an emphasis on the points of contact of spatial and temporal signifiers and illuminates their close relationship. "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time, space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). In emphasizing this "inseparability" of space and time" (84), Bakhtin anticipates one of the central concerns of Soja and indeed of the spatial turn and, what is more, introduces this concern into the realms of literature (Frank 75). Jude Bloomfield attests the (literary) arts great influence in the construction of an urban imaginary (58). Likewise, Massey herself establishes a very straightforward connection to it, when she states that in her attempt to redefine space she let herself be inspired by destabilising forces in post-structuralist literary criticism: "[T]he text has been destabilised in literary theory so space might be destabilised in geography (and indeed in wider social theory)" (*For Space* 28-9). Soja too draws on the creative arts and the power of text. Thirdspace includes both Firstspace and Secondspace perspectives, and thus combines both the easily grasped real space with that of the imaginary. Initially conceived in ideas, Secondspace can either remain an abstraction within the mind, or it can manifest itself in perceivable representations of the idea. While the idea stays within the individual imagination, the representations and projections are exposed to the public, touching with and influencing other imaginations. Traditionally the perceivable forms of Secondspace belong to the general field of the arts. "Secondspace is the interpretive locale of the creative artist and artful architect,

visually or literally representing the world in the image of their subjective imaginaries” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 79). Prose writings confer such imaginations of space into their texts, too. They describe spatial images, imparting them on their readers. Glenn Patterson’s Secondspace imagination of Belfast, his subjective picture of the city finds expression within the text of his novels. At the same time however, Firstspace aspects infiltrate the fictional representation when the material space of the real city infuses the writing. Clearly definable spatial signifiers, such as road and street names and descriptions of actual buildings, introduce an aspect of reality into the imaginary world of literature. Burton Pike uses the terms *real city* and *word-city* (x) for these relational descriptions. While the real city connotes the material reality of the city, the word-city describes its fictional imagination, and both can exert influence on the other. In his novels Glenn Patterson consciously avails himself of aspects of the real city to create his word-city. As the representation of the imaginary is influenced by reality, it creates something that is at the same time both and neither. Firstspace and Secondspace combine in the dimension of Thirdspace. Soja sums it up like this: “Thirdspace can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the “real” material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality” (6).

While Soja does refer to the literary artist, the writer nevertheless is not at the centre of his argument. However, other critics and literary and cultural theorists express thoughts that relate directly to his idea of Thirdspace. Pike addresses the existence of both real and word-city, implying a connection between the two, while Paul Patton explicitly unites the two dimensions. He describes “Imaginary Cities” as “complex objects which include both realities and their description,” sometimes even “cities confused with the words used to describe them” (112). Thus Patton not only points to an amalgamation of the real and the imaginary, but he also already addresses the reception as well as the perpetuation of urban imaginations. The description of urban space contributes to the way a city is perceived and can sometimes even superimpose itself on the material reality. *Ulysses* can serve as one straightforward example of this phenomenon.

James Joyce's description of Dublin proves so pervasive that it changes the material reality of the city. On the one hand Leopold Bloom's journey through the city centre is easily reconstructed on an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century map of Dublin. On the other hand, the contemporary Irish capital today boasts brass plates sunk into the pavements that quote passages of *Ulysses*. While the material reality of the city has influenced Joyce's description in his seminal novel, his descriptions in turn have infiltrated not only the urban perception of the city for generations but even its physical appearance. Franco Bianchini argues along a similar line. Examining the specific structure of thinking about a city, he speaks of an "urban mindscape," denoting a mixture of the "physical landscape of a city and people's visual and cultural perceptions of it" (13). He stresses firstly the dialectic between space and human presence – a dialectic which advocates of the spatial turn emphasise as well – and secondly the relationship between material realities and how people perceive them in their minds. Both Patton and Bianchini hint towards a reciprocal influence that characterises the relationship between the real and the imaginary and which Soja sees as a vital element of Thirdspace. The real affects the imaginary just as much as the imaginary has an effect on the real. As a result Thirdspace contains neither but also both, adding another dimension, paving the way for novel meanings. James Donald puts it thus: "Writing does not only record or reflect the fact of the city. It plays a role in producing the city for a reading public" (*Imagining the Modern City* 127). In other words, the city is not only represented but constructed within these texts, which in turn form a component of an image of the city for their readers: "[T]he city is an imagined environment" (Donald, "Metropolis: The City as Text" 457).<sup>15</sup> Returning to Burton Pikes'

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<sup>15</sup> Rolf Lindner agrees when he states: "Writers [...] play an essential part in the development and consolidation of the image of a particular city; indeed, the texts are actively constitutive of the city" (39), and Wolfgang Hallet and Birgit Neumann too point towards this importance of the literary text for the imagination of space, observing both the representative as well as performative power of narratives. "Erzählte Räume erlauben [...] Einblick in zweierlei: Als Repräsentationen von Raum bieten sie erstens Zugang zu kulturell vorherrschenden Raumordnungen. Als Konstruktionen kultureller Ordnungen erlauben sie zweitens Aussagen über die kulturpoietische Kraft der in der Literatur inszenierten Raummodelle, die die Realität von Machtverhältnissen mitprägen oder aber unterlaufen. Darin liegt die sowohl repräsentierende wie performative Dimension aller literarischen Raumordnungen" (16).

distinctive terminology, the real city and the word-city stand in close relation to each other, both influencing and infusing each other's perception.

Glenn Patterson's words may not (yet) have found their way onto Belfast's pavement,<sup>16</sup> but they have certainly influenced the city's image. In his literary representations of urbanity he interweaves the real with the imaginary. On the one hand, the material facts of Belfast, its topography and buildings, the lay of the land and even the climate influence his imagination of the city. On the other hand the same holds true the other way round. His experiences of his hometown and the resulting mental images of the city supersede reality. They influence his description of the city and thus also the urban image he evokes within the minds of the readers, who readjust their own mindscapes. Patterson's representation becomes performative, in the sense that it creates a new version of the city in his texts and affects the subjective images of Belfast his readers envisage. In this context he is part of a wider literary tradition, as the following section aims to show.

### **Spatiality in Northern Irish Literature**

A look at the history of Belfast's imagination in literature will help to establish pervasive modes of representations and some of the material characteristics that have influenced it.<sup>17</sup> Within the Irish literary conventions the city in general and Belfast in particular have long borne negative associations.<sup>18</sup> Throughout its history of literary representation, "Belfast has been depicted not only as violent, but also as provincial, bigoted, backward and unprogressive" (Bovone 15). In terms of industries, most notably shipbuilding, linen-making and ropeworks, Belfast constitutes the biggest and most important urban centre on the island from

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<sup>16</sup> Albeit quotations from "27 deceased Northern Ireland authors" ("Writer's Square is Literary Treasure") have indeed been inscribed on the ground of a public place in Belfast. The so-called Writer's Square is part of the only recently rejuvenated Cathedral Quarter in the city centre.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that I do not aim to delineate a complete history of Belfast's representation in literature in the following. Alexander's *'A Fount of Broken Type': Representations of Belfast in Prose* or John Wilson Foster's *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* provide far more in-depths treatments of this topic. Instead, I want to draw attention to certain thematic and representational trends that help to place Glenn Patterson's novels within the context of Northern Ireland's literary tradition.

<sup>18</sup> In one all-encompassing sweep Desmond Fitzgibbon even traces this negative representation of all "man-made geography" back to biblical origins, where "there was no architecture in Eden and [...] the first city mentioned in the Bible (Enoch) was built by a murderer, namely Cain" (65).

the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Dawe, *The Rest is History* 17). As such it stands apart from the predominantly rural Ireland, a place where this contrast between the city and the country is highly pronounced and colours national identity and rhetoric. Irish nationalists in Dublin and beyond traditionally look towards the West to find essential and untainted Irishness (Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home* 11). The Gaeltacht areas in the rural and western counties such as Galway, Mayo and Donegal, amongst others, to them represent the real Ireland and stand for the possibility of a pure and simple life in the countryside, untainted by the vices and influences of the urban and the colonial power. This imagery remains extremely popular during the struggle for independence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it is disseminated by the supporters of Irish nationalism and expressed in the texts of the Irish literary revival.<sup>19</sup> After the civil war, in the years of the Irish Free State and the early Republic, Éamon DeValera's "Golden Age, his republic of small farm owners" (O'Toole 111) ties in with this, when he propounds the picture of the rural family idyll, with everyone clustered around the cottage hearth, as the desirable form of living. In contrast the city symbolises moral and physical decay, heavily influenced by the (former) colonial power. Belfast of course is attributed with the added disadvantage of being the social and cultural centre of the predominantly loyalist North, and so it is despised within the Irish consciousness for two reasons. Firstly, it is an urban centre that relies on heavy industry, and the way of life its inhabitants lead differs extremely from the rural idyll DeValera has elevated to the national archetype.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, it constitutes an anti-republican place that remains with the colonial power, forestalling the national unity of the island of Ireland. Thus, Irish as well as foreign contemporaries regard the industrial city of Belfast as profoundly non-Irish in both the political and the

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<sup>19</sup> This trend is portrayed in James Joyce's short story "The Dead" which concludes *Dubliners*. However, the short story and its setting also exemplify the inherent contradiction of the imagery and its perpetrators, as the nationalist Molly Ivors, who fantasises about the Irish West, lives and works in Dublin. "The Irish literary revival was not a rural phenomenon. It was created in a metropolitan context for a metropolitan audience. Yet it helped to create and sustain an image of rural Ireland as an ideal which fed into the emergent political culture of Irish nationalism" (O'Toole 111).

<sup>20</sup> Alexander considers this Belfast – "which is both urban *and* industrial – as doubly damned" (*A Fount of Broken Type* 53) even before addressing political allegiances.

social sphere and instead emphasise its resemblances to British industrialised centres such as Liverpool or Glasgow (Alexander, '*A Fount of Broken Type*' 17).

Within Northern Ireland itself politically motivated communities then and now are not exempt from this intrinsic scepticism towards the city, and they too propound a binary opposition between the positively connoted rural and the negatively connoted urban. The Catholic community tends towards the nationalist imagery, representing Ireland as 'the four green fields.' This image of the field does not only imply the need for the reunification of Ulster with Leinster, Munster and Connaught, but also, once again, establishes the island as a rural space in which the concept of the city does not appear. "An examination of the ideology of the [nationalist] movement between the 1920s and the 1960s reveals an unrelieved anti-urbanism, i.e. the belief that urban life symbolized all that was essentially non-Irish and threatening to the ideal Catholic social order" (O'Dowd 48). Moreover, and despite the proscribed differences between loyalist and nationalist beliefs, the Protestant community nourishes a quite similar symbolism, when the Orange marches that are celebrated annually invariably lead to "'the field' (in reality, numerous fields scattered across Northern Ireland) where speeches are made, prayers said, and memories of the field of battle renewed" (Hughes, "Northern Ireland – Border Country" 5). In the contested space of Northern Ireland the political activists of both sides strive for a spatial imagery that lends itself to the streamlining rhetoric they employ, calling for a stable and never-changing order. The field as static (Hughes, "Northern Ireland – Border Country" 5) is pitted against the manifold and moving chaos of the city. In their respective nationalist views the two prevalent communities of Belfast exhibit a strong pull towards a rural utopia and show a pronounced scepticism towards the city.<sup>21</sup> A further reason for this aversion to the urban lies within the element of anonymity the city's social life encompasses. While the rural is equated with the idea of community, *Gemeinschaft*, the urban is associated with society, *Gesellschaft*. (Alexander, "Strange City: Belfast Gothic" 119) The former signifies a known

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<sup>21</sup> Aaron Kelly has also written on this topic, noting once again that "[u]rban space threatens the social cartographies and spatial visions of Irish Nationalism and Unionism, both of which I shall deem *rusticative* ideologies: which is to say, ideologies entrapped in a mythic orientation towards a rural idealism" (*The Thriller and Northern Ireland* 83).

family in which everybody knows each other. This echoes Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as "imagined political community" (6) and takes us back to the nationalist rhetoric shaped by a rural spatiality. "[T]he rural, and especially the rural West, is associated with what is most distinctive about Irish life and identity – its sense of place, community, kinship and mutual aid" (O'Dowd 44). In contrast to this urban society stands for cold anonymity and social neglect (Alexander, "Strange City: Belfast Gothic" 119) and, other than the intact life in the country, connotes a dysfunctional environment, spanning all spheres of social life. Thus, Belfast has long been regarded with suspicion, and Northern Irish writers are not exempt from this prejudice. In "Belfastards and Derriers" Hughes makes this point specifically about rurally based writers:

For Southerners it is the epitome of the black North. For rural Northern Catholics it is seemingly some kind of punishment (*vide* the novels of Michael McLaverty) [...], while rural Northern Protestants shuddered before it as before the sinful cities of the plain (*vide* the novels of Sam Hanna Bell, in particular *December Bride*). (152)

Indeed, Alexander sees this negative view of Belfast that Hughes demonstrates by referring to two prominent authors as the one unifying trend in literature from Northern Ireland and its critical discussion. "[W]hat each of these differing literary-critical perspectives seem to agree on is that Belfast, in fiction if not always in fact, remains a place that must either be escaped or endured" (*'A Fount of Broken Type'* 91). McLaverty's and Bell's depictions of the city already fall into a time that sees the end of Belfast's industrial expansion,<sup>22</sup> a development that invariably plays a role in its imagination. Temporally speaking, however, they are not very far removed from the beginnings of Belfast's representation in literature in general, for the Northern Irish capital only ever starts to play a role in fiction at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Alexander, *'A Fount of Broken Type'* 7).<sup>23</sup> However, public interest and appreciation of the writer remains low

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<sup>22</sup> "Belfast receded into provincial obscurity as work of its shipbuilding yards and linen factories dried up in the 1930s" and the city turns into "a dowdy middle-of-nowhere" (Alexander, "Somewhere in the Briny Say" 13).

<sup>23</sup> Alexander quotes Rev. Henry Henderson's "deservedly forgotten novel, *The True Heir of Ballymore*", published in 1859 as "the first sustained view of Belfast in fiction" (*'A Fount of Broken Type'* 6); a view that remains isolated within its time. Only when *The Red Hand*

(Alexander, *'A Fount of Broken Type'* 10-1), and “while both Ulster and Belfast have produced numerous writers, Belfast, their natural metropolis, has often in the past sped them through the double swing-doors to Dublin or London and beyond” (Longley, “The Writer and Belfast” 76). If represented at all, “Belfast’s image, through most of its history, has combined Philistia with its other possible aspects as ‘Bigots-borough’ [...] or Cokestown-across-the-water” (Longley, “The Writer and Belfast” 65).

The element of bigotry becomes even more pronounced with the eruption of the political situation in Northern Ireland into a full-blown civil war in the late 1960s. While the list of engagements with the city in fiction remains relatively short before the start of the conflict, the number of literary representations of Belfast rises dramatically from the 1970s on (Alexander, *'A Fount of Broken Type'* 7-8). The Troubles put Belfast on the map, but this literary attention comes at the cost of the heterogeneity of the city’s representation. For the next thirty years the thriller constitutes the “major response to Northern Ireland” (Hughes, “Northern Ireland – Border Country” 6). It depicts the city as a dark environment. The urban landscape provides the setting for stories of tension and mystery, of violence and hurt. “Belfast, more than many other European cities, has been stereotyped to death, its complex history in permafrost” (Dawe, “The Revenges of the Heart” 207), and, as one thriller after the other is churned out, it more often than not becomes an

unspecified battlefield, a place dominated by its ‘Troubles’ and formed, or more accurately deformed, by them into the kind of location where, as ancient maps used to be labelled, ‘Here be dragons.’ All that matters in this representation is Belfast’s imputed attributes of danger, violence and mayhem. [...] Represented in this way Belfast is not Belfast at all; it is simply a void, a blank space to be filled by novelists and film-makers with stock properties. (Hughes, “Town of Shadows” 141)

Hughes’s quote particularly refers to the so-called ‘Troubles trash’, novels that utilise the political situation in Northern Ireland for their story but engage with the

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*of Ulster* gets published in 1912 it “becomes possible to speak of ‘the Belfast novel’” (8), and even after that only “a handful of novels” (*'A Fount of Broken Type'* 8) lead up to Michael McLaverty’s novels, the first of which is published in 1939.



characteristics of Belfast on no more than a superficial level.<sup>24</sup> In these narratives the city is riddled by crime, treachery and violence. They depict a perpetual conflict without exploring its reasons or possible solutions, instead constructing the city space as gridlocked and inflexible, as material as well as social borders remain unquestioned. “At its most mechanical the thriller moves to a closure which projects its locale as a closed but always unresolved system” (Hughes, “Northern Ireland – Border Country” 6). What bothers Hughes most though is the fact that these projections of the city appear not only in Troubles trash and thrillers written by authors with an outsider’s perspective,<sup>25</sup> but are also perpetuated by Northern Irish writers:

It is as if having taken over the idea of Northern Ireland as static and complete but unresolved, the novelists have left themselves little room to insinuate their characters into the specifics of the North, and have to resort to the conventions of the thriller to establish a footing on the treacherous surface which they have accepted. The failing of the novel in regard to Northern Ireland is that, by accepting the image of the North as fated, it has not allowed for the interplay of the characters, form and circumstances. (“Northern Ireland – Border Country” 7)

This rigidity and inflexibility of the setting, a place in the limbo of violent conflict, is counteracted by a new generation of writers, as Hughes goes on to explain.

Glenn Patterson, often together with Robert McLiam Wilson, whose Belfast novel *Eureka Street* was published in 1996, is referred to be one of the first writers depicting the changing landscape of the city after the worst of the Troubles is over, making use of the ability to draft an alternative map – of his “Fähigkeit zum Gegenentwurf” (Hallet and Neumann 23). In his introduction to the essay collection *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990*, which has come out in 1991, Hughes already mentions Glenn Patterson and his first novel *Burning*

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<sup>24</sup> Even the more complexly structured thrillers still impose an atmosphere of violence and danger onto the city, irrevocably putting the Troubles at the centre of their literary narrative. For further reading see *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969*, in which Kelly writes extensively and informatively on the various forms of the thriller in Northern Ireland and its depiction of Northern Ireland and its capital.

<sup>25</sup> In this context Hughes quotes the “risible” *Patriot Games* repeatedly (“Northern Ireland – Border Country” 6; “Town of Shadows” 142). In this novel Tom Clancy manages to construct a plot around an IRA unit involving numerous assassination attempts and bombings without letting his characters set foot on Northern Irish soil once, giving a brilliant example of how a complex political situation can be simplified to become a mere narrative tool.

*Your Own. Fat Lad*, to be published one year later, would fit the bill even more accurately than the former. In an interview Glenn Patterson states that in his second novel he was “trying to update the fictional map of Belfast, trying to find new ways of expressing the city. When I was writing the book, Ciaran Carson’s *Belfast Confetti* came out. It was clear that he was about the same thing” (D’Hoker and Schwall 91). Like Hughes, who not only mentions Robert McLiam Wilson but also Belfast writer Danny Morrison alongside him, firmly establishing this new development as an urban one, Patterson goes on to incorporate himself into a wider trend. “I think it was symptomatic of a phase that Belfast society was going through. People were trying to find new images and one of the obvious ways to do that was land-reclamation and the changing city” (D’Hoker and Schwall 91-2). These new images of Belfast that the (literary) arts construct share many important characteristics. Neil Alexander’s description of Ciaran Carson’s poetry can just as easily be applied to Patterson’s writing: “Carson’s representations of Belfast resist and rebuke the idea that the spatial, social, and historical multiplicity of the city can be reduced to a polarised sectarian grid of forces and crass binary oppositions” (*Space, Place, Writing* 25). Patterson too, who sees Carson’s work as very influential to his own, creates a heterogeneous Belfast that combines spatial, social and historical dimensions. Like the poet, the novelist does not see the sectarian narratives as the only ones worth telling but continuously deconstructs prevalent binarisms, emphasising the relational and complex character of the urban.

Already in his choice of setting, Patterson distances himself from a nationalist agenda of any kind. By establishing his texts within a city’s multiplicity, he instead takes the opportunity to deconstruct nationalist narratives and to introduce alternative viewpoints. Speaking about his literary influences, Patterson addresses the impact Salman Rushdie’s India as portrayed in *Midnight’s Children* had on his own work: “Rushdie’s treatment of countries as collective fictions (willed or imposed) and as significant characters in their inhabitants’ lives accorded perfectly with my own ideas of how to begin reimagining Northern Ireland” (“I am a Northern Irish Novelist” 151). Patterson’s focus on the capital city of Northern Ireland directly relates to the way the author sees himself. He

calls himself a “Belfast person” (*Belfast, Nordirland*), positing the urban identity above a national one. This choice enables him in his novels to outline an open environment that permits multiple identities in contrast to the closed environment of nationalism, which demands a fixed identity. Patterson demonstrates a distinct antipathy against the closed and simplifying political views that have pervasively shaped (Northern) Irish politics for more than a century and exhibits a strong scepticism against the idea of the nation as essential. “I don’t believe in original states. [...] I have a great fear of nationality, or nationalism. Of course it is difficult to talk about this in Ireland, because it sounds as though that means Irish nationalism. But I have a fear of all nationalisms. I think nationalisms are fictions, I just can’t understand what a nation is” (D’Hoker and Schwall, 93-4). Moving on to dismiss national borders, in particular the one dividing the island of Ireland, as arbitrary and logically flawed, he nevertheless concedes its pervasive influence on the Northern Irish sense of identity. However, this identity is adaptable and thus lacks the essentialist and static quality nationalism assigns to it:

There is something that binds us together, those people that have been hemmed in by that little wriggly line. It’s not that it means a great deal to me, if it goes it goes, but we would have to adapt to a different context. That’s also why I like cities. They are always places of some chaos, they are slightly anarchic. They are places of a mixture as opposed to countries and borders which are exclusive. (D’Hoker and Schwall 95)

Embracing the presence of chaos and the elements of multiplicity, Patterson shows himself influenced by ideas of postmodernism. He no longer focuses on the dark implications the city brings with it, but sees the complexity and heterogeneity of the urban and the freedom that goes with it as a positive quality. He rejects nationalist simplification and revels in the existence of choice. He embraces the possibility of an alternative lifestyle, along with the propensity for continuous change. He believes in “internal renewal, a perpetual revision or re-imagining” (Patterson, “Europe between Political Folklore and National Populism” 286), and these attributes become inherent characteristics of the new urban fictions.

Glenn Patterson belongs to a new generation of Northern Irish writers. He strives to represent Belfast as a living structure that encompasses both positive and negative aspects, as a city whose greatest assets are its people<sup>26</sup> and the change they continuously bring about it, for “[t]he landscape is not a pre-existing thing itself. It is made into a landscape, that is, into a humanly meaningful space, by the living that takes place within it” (Hillis Miller 21). This emphasis turns space into an ‘event’ in itself; it becomes a never-ending “process rather than something to be understood in terms of rootedness, authenticity and ontological security” (Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home* 9). The stability of roots is relieved by the flexibility of routes, a term that connotes important characteristics of a new understanding of place. In this context Elmer Kennedy-Andrews raises the question of a “move away from concepts of rootedness and towards a poetics and politics of displacement, mobility, openness and pluralism” (*Writing Home* 3) in recent Northern Irish poetry. In Glenn Patterson’s prose this shift reveals itself repeatedly, both inside and outside his novels. *Lapsed Protestant* includes an article first published in the year 2002, “Traffic”. It picks up the idea of social interconnectedness and mobility in title and content, and it finishes with an idea that describes the move Kennedy-Andrews outlines for Northern Irish poetry six years later: “Maybe it’s time we stopped thinking about roots and thought instead about the *routes* by which we have been arrived at” (*Writing Home* 171). This constant movement, resulting in the construction of intricate networks and encounters manifests itself in the material topography and social web of the city, as Glenn Patterson represents it in fiction. Its urbanity can be compared to Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s idea of the rhizome, which is defined by “principles of connection and heterogeneity [and multiplicity (8)]: Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (7). Devoid of beginning or end, a rhizome constitutes an intricate network of crisscrossing lines that “always tie back to one another” (9). Binaries cannot exist in a sphere in which

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<sup>26</sup> For Patterson the inhabitants of a city form a much more organic and open community than the idea of nationalism constructs. “[T]hat is the beautiful thing about a city, you don’t have to qualify for citizenship: you live in it, you are of it” (*Lapsed Protestant* 133).

everything is connected to everything else. “That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy” (9). Accordingly, closure of meaning is not possible but everything remains open to reinterpretation. Soja’s concept of ‘thirding,’ Massey’s deconstruction of ‘dichotomous dualisms’ and Derrida’s theory of *différance* all reverberate within this notion, which repeatedly manifests itself in Patterson’s texts.

Glenn Patterson deliberately destabilises binarisms specific to Belfast in particular or to urban spatiality in general, introducing alternative viewpoints that construct Belfast as a postmodern city. He establishes a middle ground between antipodal oppositions, deconstructing binary and closed-off perspectives. The most polarizing opposition inherent to Northern Ireland he challenges in his novels is undoubtedly the one between ‘Protestant / loyalist / British’ on the one hand and ‘Catholic / nationalist / Irish’ on the other hand. The two supposed communities in Northern Ireland define themselves as essential, irrevocable and immutable. This attitude has generated an image of the country and its small city as deadlocked in its binary separation and political conflict, “a society of fixed forms and binarisms, a battered relic from an idea of history as endlessly circular and dependent on an oppositional, rather than dialectic, relationship” (Kirkland, *Literature and Culture* 2). Patterson writes against these presumptions. Not only does he deny the opposing terms their exclusive binarism, but he even questions their right to exist. He attacks the use of religious terms for two exclusive groups that have no longer anything to do with religious faith. Furthermore he undermines the terminology from the perspective of nationness, exposing the national categories as both artificially constructed and outdated. Thus, he challenges the legitimacy of the nation in his postmodern texts, and establishes its very idea as obsolete. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson describes the nation not as a natural state of being that has always existed, but as a “cultural artefact [...] of a particular kind” (4), constructed under certain conditions. In direct relation to this, Stuart Woolf states that “national identity is analysed as a cultural construction, not a fixed objective reality, but an ongoing and changeable process, dependent on and deriving from social relations, and hence not exclusive of other identities” (8). Nationalists and loyalists in Northern Ireland both define

themselves “in relation to the existence of the ‘Other’” (Woolf 7), since national identity “depends on exclusion as much as on inclusion [...]. But the definitions of who should be included and who excluded are fundamentally arbitrary” (Woolf 32).<sup>27</sup> In his writing Patterson reveals both the constructedness and arbitrariness of national identity and denies it its dominance. Instead other identities such as gender or the affiliation to an urban environment become important. The city, as Roland Barthes remarked, “is the site of our encounter with the other” (199), and in this process of interconnecting sociality differences diminish and similarities become apparent. Opposing binarisms vanish as they permeate one another and form new meaning.

Other oppositions undermined by Glenn Patterson are more closely related to spatiality and have been the subject of some scrutiny by spatial theorists, such as the binary concept of the global versus the local. Writing about a unique urban environment that nevertheless shares many characteristics with cities across the world, and which cannot be seen in isolation but has to be regarded as part of an increasingly interconnected network, Patterson lets the notions of globality and locality infiltrate his writing. While in academia the two have already been merged into the concept of *glocalisation*, a term first introduced by the sociologist Roland Robertson, the recombination of global and local elements of the city in Patterson’s texts helps to assemble the Belfast of his fiction. The collective versus the individual constitutes another polarising opposition that he challenges. In this context the term *community*<sup>28</sup> becomes important, a word that for Patterson bears many negative connotations and implies exactly the bipolar fixedness of society he so contests. Therefore Patterson strives to reassert the individual within the collective, something vital to the definition of a community according to his imaginary. He sets the terms against each other but also merges them together, endowing the word *community* with a new meaning while stressing the

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<sup>27</sup> This idea of arbitrariness finds expression above in the ‘wiggly line’ Patterson describes.

<sup>28</sup> Community also fits into the context of the other mentioned binarisms. Global society for example stands in direct comparison to the local community. Furthermore, the insurmountable divisions between two antagonistic communities are one of the most pervasive pictures to be populated about Northern Ireland in the world. It implies a split society which only one characteristic is crucial to affiliation of one of the two prescribed sections, where one is swallowed by the collective completely. No individual expression of identity is possible.

importance of the individual. This recombination contributes to the creation of the complex social networks that infuse Patterson's representation of Belfast, and which I establish as one aspect of my three-fold analysis, taking my cue for a relational definition of space.

Not regarding different plots, stories, character constellations and narrative situations, the interplay of spatial, social and historical dimensions infiltrates all of Glenn Patterson's novels.<sup>29</sup> The fictional texts address the three categories, merging them into a vivid picture of the city that, just as Soja remarks of the theoretical concept of the trialectics, is characterized by its complexity and constant evolution. Patterson does not aim at the presentation of permanence or completeness but is attracted by the potential of cities for never-ending evolution and change. The textual spatiality amalgamates Firstspace and Secondspace perspectives, stringing together material city-spaces with the characters' urban mindscapes. Belfast's progression through time, its past and history, is a topic addressed again and again and always plays into the spatial representations – just as the social aspects of the Northern Irish capital do. Patterson portrays the citizens of Belfast with great humanity. The people and their social interactions constitute the heart of the city in his texts. Their actions, thoughts, and emotions, their relationship to each other and interactions with each other are highlighted. The social element of Patterson's fiction is assembled through countless interconnecting micronarratives that jostle for attention and together form a highly democratic image of Belfast. These multiple storylines and shifting perspectives together with a tendency to undermine fixed categories and to deconstruct existing binarisms constitute recurring narrative techniques within the novels. They contribute to the creation of a complex city imaginary and infuse the three interrelated dimensions of the urban complex. Highlighting the consistency with which they recur in Glenn Patterson's novels, as well as the various ways in which they are realized within the texts, I repeatedly focus on them in order to

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<sup>29</sup> John Brannigan points towards these three urban aspects that especially infuse Patterson's imaginative representation of the city: "Belfast is magnetic because of its rich history, crowded geography, and complicated interwoven subcultures" (154).

outline the multi-layered, heterogeneous and shifting conception of the Belfast imaginary.



## **Representations of Belfast: A Threefold Analysis**

Despite the fact that the interrelatedness of the spatial, the social and the historical forms an important part of this thesis' argument, its literary analysis is structured into individual chapters, each concentrating on one of the three categories. Cross-references will therefore be unavoidable, and I consciously include them to maintain a close connection between the three chapters.

In the following I show that as the material, social and historical components come together in Glenn Patterson's novels, a three-dimensional and multi-faceted Belfast develops, one that never stands still. The aforementioned narrative techniques that directly relate to the three-fold structure are touched upon in all chapters.

### **The Material Perspective**

Belfast in Patterson's texts is partly established through the physical space described. Streets and buildings form the cityscape of Belfast. As they take shape in the texts, they provide the urban materiality on which the image of the city is based and fulfil specific roles within the complex structure of the city. These vary from novel to novel and from narrative perspective to narrative perspective. While *Fat Lad* and *That Which Was* emphasise the urban character of Belfast, describing the labyrinthine composition of streets and districts, *The International* and *Number 5* paint a more homely but also spatially limited picture of the city. As characters perceive them differently, streets as well as houses can form intimate neighbourhoods but also alien structures. Nearly all texts borrow copiously from the real Belfast, including street names and iconic landmarks in the narratives, showing the "meticulousness of Patterson's local detail" (Patten, "Fiction in Conflict" 141) and establishing the locality as a major factor in the novels. The urban environment of the texts intersects with its rural surroundings, and limits of the characters' city imaginary are explored. As the Troubles take a hold of the city, the physical markers of civil unrest in the form of sectarian boundaries emerge and become a part of Belfast's materiality. However, the novels never

make them out as fixed and unmoving, but stress their constructedness and precarious nature.

These countless perceptions of urban materiality, its various functions and constantly shifting interfaces and borders establish a material cityscape that is diverse, multi-faceted and changing. They elevate the city to a complex character in its own right in the novels.

### **Streets**

More than a mere setting, the urban layout, the material reality of the Belfast featured in *Fat Lad* profoundly influences the narrative. Glenn Patterson confirms the central role the city plays in the novel and adds that both artistic representations as well as personal perceptions colour the novel's urban environment:

I moved back to Belfast shortly after [*Burning Your Own*] was published because I had been trying to write another novel set in the then-present-day Belfast, the late 1980s, and found that every time I went back the present day Belfast I was writing about was then yesterday's Belfast. It kept changing. [...] This became part of the fabric of the novel, *Fat Lad*. It became a very important part of it – this novel was heavily influenced by a work of non-fiction, a Blackstaff Press book by Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: An Illustrated History*. (“Writing the Troubles” 16)

Influenced by his own experiences of a 1980s Belfast, Glenn Patterson positions his story and the characters within a rapidly transforming cityscape, alive with geographical detail. The protagonist's journeys lead him through the city on foot, in his sister's car and on the bus. Drew's ambivalent perception of the cityscape stresses his double role as both in- and outsider. Having grown up in Belfast, he returns to the city of his birth after years of voluntary exile. He takes in the maze of streets and junctions from different vantage points and experiences the space from both a familiar and alien perspective. In the course of the novel Drew learns to reconcile the imagery of the Belfast he has left with that of the Belfast he has returned to, accepting both the changes and historical influences. Immediately after his arrival he begins to reacquaint himself with the city and its material reality. At the airport familiar sights and feelings (not least of all the ever-present rain, which sets the mood for Drew's arrival) clash with new impressions: “The

doors opened on the arrivals lounge and a notice welcomed passengers no longer to Aldergrove, but to Belfast International Airport” (FL 5). His peculiar double perspective comes home to Drew on the way into the city centre, when the old man sitting next to him on the bus does not cease pointing out landmarks to Drew, despite the latter’s reassurances “that he was Belfast born and bred himself” (FL 6). As the man insists on imparting his intricate knowledge of the urban landscape, Drew’s familiarity with the city rates lower and appears less personal. While the man points out single houses, Drew notices the larger, less individual, structuring elements of the city: “At that point he saw the road swell magnificently to ten lanes then burst into splinters: Bangor, Docks, Newtownards, City Centre, Westlink, M1, The West” (FL 7). Although the motorway roads Drew sees most certainly do not number among the most stunning properties of the city, the multitude of possibilities they contain appear at that moment “magnificent” to the young returnee, who remembers Belfast as a closed city with nowhere to turn to. While the city of the past was a dead-end place with virtually no potential for escape, the new Belfast presents itself from the beginning as a place in which movement, whether locally by car or globally by plane, is possible – a place incorporated into a spatial network.

A couple of days later the first walk into the centre and to his place of work again highlights the sense of alienation Drew experiences:<sup>30</sup>

It was a twenty-minute walk from his flat into town. Malone Road, University Road, Bradbury Place, Shaftesbury Square... Buildings appeared to him one at a time, stripped of context, jutting into space as though craning their necks. *Where the fuck are we?* ...Dublin Road, Bedford Street, Donegall Square – West, North – Donegall Place. Turning a final corner, he followed for a time the course of the culverted Farset as it flowed, unseen, from its shrouded source to its ancient, city-christening union with the fog-bound Lagan, and then he was there. Belfast’s Bookstore. (FL 14)

In this quotation, Drew’s annoyance and unfamiliarity with the city’s skyline transfers onto the very brick and mortar. The buildings are invested with the

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<sup>30</sup> According to Horst Weich the journey through the city constitutes a description of urbanity that specifically emphasises the dynamic character of the environment and its inhabitants (42). Thus Drew’s travels can be read as another means to create the cityscape as a continually evolving complex. Pike expresses a similar idea when he states: “The street-level vantage point is the most common in city literature. It is a marvellous vehicle for conveying complexity” (35).

irritated disorientation Drew himself experiences. Many of them would have been erected after he had left the city, as a result of both sectarian bombings and redevelopment projects, contributing to a new and alien cityscape. At the same time, however, Drew's familiarity with Belfast's geographical particularities becomes apparent. He intrinsically knows of unseen landmarks, follows the underground tributary Farset and anticipates it merging with the Lagan hidden in the fog. He also methodically names all the street names he passes, delineating his journey for the reader, who can easily follow Drew on a map of Belfast. This again shows his curiously antipodal perspective of both an insider and an outsider to the city.<sup>31</sup> While the namedropping demonstrates his knowledge of the city, it is also something somebody unfamiliar with it would do. In an effort to find their way around the urban maze, a stranger would memorize all the street names along the journey and reel them off as they walk along them, or check them on a map. Additionally the jumble of streets, buildings and geographical markers create an urban environment. Multiple directions stress the labyrinthine and complex character of the city.

Of course the street names also establish the Belfast setting. These names do not constitute a randomly chosen selection of streets one could find in any city, but they are central places in Belfast. Donegall Square especially, the main square of the city which houses the most iconic and famous building in Belfast, the City Hall, can be seen as a means to turn the urban layout into an individual place and firmly establishes Glenn Patterson's novels as local narratives that relate to the actual city of Belfast. It comes as no surprise that square and building feature not only in *Fat Lad*; *The International* incorporates the famous landmarks most heavily as "[t]he International Hotel stood on the south side of Donegall Square, directly behind the City Hall" (TI 15), and almost the whole story is set within the hotel or a short radius around it. Even *Number 5*, which never refers to the city by its name and presents the most localised and unspecific narrative of the four analysed here, mentions the city's central square: on one of the rare occasions one of the characters takes the reader outside the estate, the young Tan watches as

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Bradford calls this an "ingenious double focus", in which Drew's "observations are intercut with his special, endemic knowledge of the place" (229).

“[o]utside the city hall daffodils were being sold from black plastic buckets” (N5 167).

Only Avery’s narrative in *That Which Was* does not expressly refer to the building and its specific location, although he is probably the one character of all Patterson’s novels who travels most widely within Belfast. Just as *Fat Lad*, *That Which Was* creates a picture of Belfast that emphasises its urban characteristics. When Avery drives his car through the centre and the suburbs, traffic congestions and urban street life inform the image of the city:

He cast his mind back again to yesterday’s journey home. The traffic had been heavy enough coming away from the university, he remembered that. He flicked the display cover again with his nail. Binmen were hopping from the footpath on the tailboard of the lorry. Its rear end swung right into the centre of the road, then followed its nose left down a broad side-street. Engines revved. The trapped bus slipped back into its lane, pursued by two others travelling at speed along the cleared channel to confirm to people further down the road what they had always suspected: you wait half an hour then three come at once. (TWW 186)

Car-packed multilane streets, public transport and city workers form the materiality that establishes Belfast as a major city, similar to European counterparts (Schwerter 239). “Tonnes of metal” (TWW 214) hamper Avery’s movement through the city, and even though he is a local to Belfast, he occasionally loses his way in the urban maze of streets. Especially the outskirts of the city provide a challenge for his sense of orientation, the geography of the city melting into impersonal and unfamiliar brick and mortar: “The reception was in one of those places, whose names Avery always confused, out the road to the international airport – motoring lodges once upon a time, extended and extended through the fifties and sixties and, in nearly every case, bombed in the seventies and eighties and more or less substantially rebuilt since” (TWW 68). In a city that never stands still but constantly transforms itself, even Avery, who traverses it daily, fails to retain an overview. Just as *Fat Lad*, *That Which Was* establishes Belfast as a shifting and moving complex, and not even its material markers can be relied upon to give guidance and stability. Once again the transformations are sped along by the violent upheaval of the Troubles. Explosions change the

cityscape faster than any wrecking ball, turning the area into a maze of building names and streets that can hardly be kept apart. Yet despite the material scars the Troubles cause, the bombings also have a positive effect and carry “a certain liberating potential” (Patterson, “I am a Northern Irish novelist” 151). They leave a clean slate of an uninscribed space that enables a constant renewal of meaning. The redevelopers that follow the bombings contribute to the transformation of the cityscape, giving Belfast a new face and new character. “[Belfast] kept changing. The bombers helped of course [...] but the redevelopers also helped by finally getting around to putting some new buildings into the city” (Patterson, “Writing the Troubles” 16).

*That Which Was* also includes urban renewal officially sanctioned and welcomed by the city council. The Cathedral Quarter features as one of Avery’s and Larry’s meeting points. Larry always insists on “somewhere busy” because “they would be safer somewhere like that” (TWW 108): “Larry was there. Down the narrow street he had named in the network of narrow streets behind the cathedral: the Cathedral Quarter, as no one but the developers and the council’s tourism sub-committee was yet remembering to call it” (TWW 47). The new district has only recently been developed and has yet to become a part of the inhabitants’ image of Belfast.<sup>32</sup> Avery himself so far has not gotten acquainted with the new layout the labyrinthine narrow streets. This is emphasised by the lack of proper names within the narrative. The streets remain anonymous and interchangeable, evoking an urban maze in which one can easily get lost.

Both in *That Which Was* and *Fat Lad* the physical space of the city and the streets through which Avery and Drew move are utilised to underline the urban characteristics of Belfast and to establish it as a complex, moving and sometimes confusing city of many possibilities. Adding the complexity of Drew’s double perspective as both in- and outsider, the narrative of *Fat Lad* focuses especially on Belfast’s transformations. Both protagonists travel widely through this labyrinth, and the novels paint the image of a heterogeneous city that encompasses different

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<sup>32</sup> I will focus further on the constant transformation the city undergoes in Glenn Patterson’s texts and especially the way the characters perceive this transformation in the chapter on the novels’ temporal dimension.

districts and displays various faces as it stretches across the centre as well as into the suburbs and outskirts.

In contrast *Number 5* focuses on an estate outside the city centre and limits the space of action to a handful of localized streets. The neighbourhood, which includes not only a residential area but also a high street leading into the city centre with a row of shops, is perceived very differently by the characters in *Number 5*, emphasising both the polyvalent character of the city and the multitude of existing urban imaginaries that come together to create the literary representation of Belfast in the novel. As an example, I will analyse Tan's and Rodney's attitudes towards the streets that surround them and show how they represent freedom and the opportunity of expression for the former and danger and insecurity for the latter.

Rodney McGovern and his wife Margaret are living in Number 5 throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, a time in which Belfast is characterised by sectarian fighting, the presence of the British army, and casual murder for petty reasons such as walking on the wrong side of the street. So, while the narrative of *Number 5* alludes to the violence in the city only in discussions and hardly ever lets it enter the domesticized area of the estate,<sup>33</sup> Rodney is nervous when Margaret sends him to buy a present in the evening:

It must have been years since I had last had to go out on to that main road at night. I had driven through after dark, but driving through didn't prepare you. It was not an experience I'd want to repeat in a hurry. The only premises that didn't have their shutters down were the off-licence and the hot-food bar, the Chuck Wagon, on the same side of the street. [...]

The language was nothing ordinary. Eff this, eff that, eff in the middle of other words. The letter F itself had been spray-painted in red over the first two letters of Chuck. (N5 102-3)

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<sup>33</sup> The murder of András Hideg being the one exception, although even he is not killed at home, but in his place of work. Additionally he is not directly involved in any sectarian activity, but apparently has incurred the wrath of a republican paramilitary organization by fitting a police station with new urinals. This blatantly trivial reason for his murder emphasizes the absurdity of the conflict and denies the violence its legitimization – something Glenn Patterson's subtly implies on numerous occasions in his Belfast novels.

The public space, even if it is only the local high street, intimidates Rodney, who, coming from the country, reacts hypersensitively to these negative aspects of the city. Economic decline shows its most obvious effects in the urban environment that is made volatile by the agglomeration of industrial activity. In Belfast, a city with a great working-class population, the economic decline works hand in hand with the political insecurity to make the streets appear run-down in Rodney's eyes.<sup>34</sup> His description does not contain any blatant markers of desolation or danger. Lowered shutters at night-time can hardly be called uncommon, and the coarse language is not directed at him. However, the relative harmlessness of this scene does not distract from Rodney's feelings but heightens the sense of subjective perception. The man's implicit attitude towards urban living and his mental image of Belfast colour the picture he paints of the nightly cityscape, as he focuses almost exclusively on the negative impressions the high street imparts on him: "I stared for a moment at the enormous male genitals, sprayed, the same colour as the F in Chuck, on the shutter of Watt's the butcher's across the way" (N5 106). The streets constitute an alien, insecure and dangerous environment in Rodney's story.

Tan's narrative on the other hand reveals a completely different take on urban living. In it the streets do not represent danger and insecurity but stand for (at least a hint of) freedom and a space of rebellious expression. In contrast to Rodney, who rarely ventures into public space, Tan spends as much time as he can outside with his friend Tit. "There were twelve streets in all round our way. Tit and I walked every inch of them time after time, after time" (N5 126). The two boys strive to escape the constriction of their homes and to make the neighbourhood, which seems hardly big enough for them, their own. They do so in two ways: Firstly, by walking the streets, they claim them with their physical presence. Secondly, they leave a more lasting imprint in writing, scrawling their names on the material substance of the city. "We wrote our names. Tit'n'Tan. On bollards, on shutters, on rubbish bins bracketed to lamp-posts, in shorthand on the

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<sup>34</sup> Although the political aspect is not mentioned in this quotation, Rodney exhibits his preoccupation with the political situation in Northern Ireland repeatedly in his heated discussions with András Hideg.



brackets themselves. T'n'T. Dynamite" (N5 130). Their names spread over the city's material space do not only imply ownership, but the act of writing them also defies paramilitary domination. Painting on walls throughout the city and adorning them with their messages is, in the 1970s and 1980s, the prerogative of the various loyalist and republican groups that have formed during the Troubles. With their pictures and statements, they place their mark on the urban space and define the city according to their convictions. In adding their own names and messages to the streets, Tit and Tan destroy this dualistic determination and open up the space of the city to new possibilities and new meaning. What is more, Tit's creations ridicule the national narrative that legitimises the Troubles and the adversaries' hold of the city: "Our names on this occasion were to be wrapped in a flag entirely of Tit's devising. Next thing we'd be getting our own national anthem" (N5 130). The boy does not subscribe to any of the two parties that fight over the domination of the city, but deconstructs the justification of their existence. In creating a flag of his own, he underscores the constructedness of the national narrative and denies it the existentialist origin its followers believe in. Even more daringly, Tit does not hesitate to send a personal and signed message to his fellow wall painters:

Tit'n'Tan.

He drew a scroll around it, like the scrolls you'd see on paramilitary wall paintings right across the city, like we were a two-man army ourselves. FTA, he wrote underneath. Fuck them all. (N5 126)

While in Rodney's narrative the public space of the city represents an insecure and intimidating environment that imposes a closed character on the city, in Tan's narrative it provides an opportunity for expression. The boys regard the streets as familiar territory and as a way to escape the confining domesticity within their homes. In *Number 5* the materiality of the city is construed to create diverging images, which rub alongside in the novel to form a heterogeneous city that can encompass an infinite number of imaginaries of itself, one or more for each reader of its signs.

In *The International* the representation of the streets serves to deconstruct a binarism, showing the city as a flexible complex with multiple meanings. In this narrative technique that Patterson uses on several occasions in his novels two antipodal terms whose meanings are assumed to be stable lose their rigidity. Instead of insisting on inflexible differentiation the narrative undermines the opposition and introduces new meaning. In deconstructing the binary concepts of the city space, *The International* creates an open urbanity that enables renewal and change. The novel blurs the opposition between public and private by opening up the Blue Bar to encompass the public life of the streets. The International Hotel constitutes a home away from home and yet a place open to everybody, The Blue Bar especially functions not only as the nexus of the hotel, but at the same time also constitutes as a public meeting place. This institution is much more to its costumers than merely a place to buy alcoholic drinks. In opening its doors towards Belfast's streets it becomes an extension of home. The Blue Bar fulfils the role of a local pub, welcoming hotel guests as well as Belfast citizens from all walks of life indiscriminately. "The International was unique then in Belfast. People who had never set foot in a hotel in their lives looked upon its bar as their local; their living room, some of them" (TI 30). In this quote a degree of domesticity enters the public sphere that deconstructs the borders between private and public. Saturday night, when the bar becomes alive with people, is Danny's prime example of this amalgamation of two opposing concepts:

Half past eight on a Saturday evening in a busy bar. A blessed time, I used to think – before McGurk's, before McLaughlin's, before The Four Step Inn, The Mountainview Tavern, The Crescent Bar, before Loughinisland – the time when you were most likely to feel yourself in communion with other bars in other cities and towns and villages too small to merit a mention on the map. In grander hotels than ours, in gin palaces and lounges and salons and corner bars and houses where it was still possible to comprehend how fine the line had once been between private and public, people were gathered at half past eight on a Saturday night, money in their pocket and a drink in their hand. Good people, bad people and people no better than they ought to be. The week's end. (TI 159)

Despite Danny's lament over the increasing differentiation between the private and the public, Saturday in the Blue Bar clearly bridges this gap. The binarism disappears in these hours and establishes the possibility of a liberating middle

ground. Private and public spaces lose their meaning and merge into a new concept of sociality. In *The International* the materiality of the city provides the spatial setting for social interaction within and outside the hotel.

Danny observes this social dimension of the space in the streets. His eye for social movement and interaction becomes apparent at several instances in the novel, for example when “out on the Linen Hall Street the commercial day was already on the wane. The solicitors and insurers who occupied the old linen warehouses had shut up shop for the weekend and traffic here was sparse and bound for out of town” (TI 59). His illegal homosexual interests require Danny to pick up the slightest signs from others, and he is skilled in recognising even subtle emotional phenomena: “At the corner of Adelaide Street and Donegall Square South a couple were conducting a whispered argument on the steps down to Cotter’s Kitchen. She turned her back. There were tears in his eyes” (TI 15). While street names of central Belfast establish the local setting, for Danny the streets first and foremost present an opportunity to observe his fellow men and women and join in the social interaction himself. The young man takes the material space of the city for granted, concentrating on the people inhabiting it. He gives a detailed description of Belfast society, but only in retrospect he becomes aware of the material city. Looking back, he states: “I wish I could describe for you Belfast as it was then, [...] but I’m afraid I was not in the habit of noticing it much myself” (TI 61). In *The International* the materiality of the city, like in Glenn Patterson’s other Belfast novels, serves as a marker of locality, but, more pronouncedly than elsewhere, it also constitutes the spatial canvas on which Belfast life can unfold. *The International* focuses very much on social interaction in order to establish a supremely humane Belfast. The material cityscape spatially anchors this sociality. Its description that puts emphasis on the subjects peopling the cityscape points towards a living urbanity which is flexible and open in its meaning. In *The International* especially the close relationship between the physical and the social city becomes apparent, and while I expound further on Belfast’s sociality in the following chapter, a prolonged look at smaller units of materiality reveals more interconnections.

## Houses

Buildings feature strongly in all of Patterson's novels, and two of them are named accordingly. While *The International* constitutes the fictional representation of a hotel that also existed in real Belfast, *Number 5* carries a more generic title and puts a house in the centre of its narrative that could not only be located anywhere in the city but also in any other city. Laura Pelaschiar talks about the creation of an "Everycity" ("Transforming Belfast" 130) when she analyses Patterson's texts, because the writer paints a picture of urbanity that is not only applicable to Belfast but to city life in general, incorporating the Northern Irish capital into a European image, stressing its normality. Patterson creates a relatedness that frees Belfast from the isolation inflicted upon it by the political unrest and enables more narratives. He uses a characteristic that Edna Longley vehemently applies to Northern writing in the early 1990s: "It overflows borders and manifests a web of affiliation that stretches beyond any heartland – to the rest of Ireland, Britain, Europe" ("Edna Longley: From *From Cathleen to Anorexia*" 1083). In the same sense as Belfast in the novels constitutes an 'Everycity' the house in *Number 5* can be called an 'Everyhouse' despite its obvious distinctiveness and locality.<sup>35</sup> Like the streets, the house in *Number 5* fulfils various roles and functions, incorporating a multitude of spatial imageries.

In *The International* the hotel constitutes the physical nexus both of the narrative and the city that is created within this narrative. As the core setting it is centrally located within the plot as well as the city, standing next to City Hall, on Donegall Square. Therefore and because of its physical appearance

[y]ou were unlikely to miss it. A canopy of frosted glass, supported by slender mosaic pillars, thrust the name, in blue lettering, out into the street; low black marble walls flanked the approach to the main entrance and shielded the stairs which ran down on either side from the footpath to the basement bars. It was only stunning. (TI 15)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> And indeed this is also what the Sunday Express Review said about it, quoted after the book's copyright page: "A surprisingly ambitious and ultimately satisfying view of the real world seen from an ordinary house that could be anywhere."

<sup>36</sup> The emphasis on the face of the building and its transition into the public space of the streets demonstrates again the amalgamation of private and public, as the streets can be seen to represent an extension of the building.

Danny's detailed and referential description of the hotel gains in significance when considering that the young barman does not take much notice of the surrounding cityscape but concentrates on social interaction: "It was simply the Town" (TI 61). The International Hotel stands out in a Belfast that Danny takes for granted and does not give much thought to: "Ask me then, did I like it and I don't know that I would have understood the question; you might as well have asked me did I like breathing" (TI 62). The hotel forms the central materiality of Belfast. As a meeting point for its inhabitants it constitutes a microcosm of the city, incorporating urban life and its various social dimensions within its walls. The building stands as a *pars pro toto* for the city.

In contrast to the prominent locality and symbolic grandeur of The International Hotel, the house in *Number 5* is neither centrally located, nor does it have a very distinctive look about it. The building rather acts as a chameleon, being adjusted in form and function to the people who occupy it. The materiality of the building emphasises the interconnectedness of the chapters of the novel, but at the same time highlights the individuality and uniqueness of these stories. Thus the house stands for a spatial environment established by a network of interrelated but heterogeneous narratives. While the very brick and mortar remains, at least for its best part, the exterior as well as the interior constantly change and adapt to the current owners and residents. The house relates the families' stories to each other, while at the same time setting them apart from each other. The occupants personalise their home, making it their own, just as they claim the individual narratives as their own. The real estate advertisements heading each of the five stories demonstrate this by listing both the house's continuing characteristics and the changes it has undergone. They also establish the house as the central setting that bundles multiple narratives and the locale of many personal dramas from the very start.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Schlögel, who sees the house as the smallest unit and the densest parameter of life there is (314), stresses its centrality for personal narratives: "Es bedarf keiner allzu großen Phantasie, um das Haus als *den* Schauplatz und Knotenpunkt aller für ein Leben wesentlichen Begebenheiten

The building itself, like the streets, fulfils various functions for the characters. It can be home, safe house and prison. It can be a determined environment but also a blank surface to be moulded and fashioned. Stella, for example, exhibits an ambivalent relationship to the house. She feels weighed down by it and the estate. Because of the physical proximity of the neighbouring buildings and the thin walls that let through any sound, she is at the same time exposed to prying eyes and penned up in a closed off environment. Already her first visit at Ivy's imposes the smallness of the estate on Stella: "I could see the alarm clock on my own bedside table. I could nearly read the hands" (N5 10). The private and the public rub against each other again in *Number 5*, largely due to the intimate setting of the housing estate and the closely-knit community that grows together over the years. Stella struggles to come to terms with these constricted living arrangements and the loss of privacy that results from it. As Ivy puts it, there is "no one more private about her person than Stella Falloon" (N5 292). She goes on to explain the difficulty of keeping the private just that and separating it from the public herself: "When houses are as close together as ours it's an effort a lot of the time not to look, a heartache now and then what you do, without meaning to, see" (N5 304).

Just like Ivy and much more than some other characters, Stella is aware of how permeable the border between those two opposing terms is and how easily one might accidentally overstep it. In communication with her neighbours she continuously tries to respect the "fine line between avoiding getting too friendly too quickly and appearing stuck up, and it didn't do to be thought stuck up" (N5 13). Stella's concerns are additionally fed by the very materiality of the estate. Tightly-built houses and thin walls constantly remind the young woman of the physical presence of her neighbours as she tries to keep private acts private:

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auszumachen" (314). Even more fittingly for *Number 5*, Paustowski imagines the house as the ideal setting for a social novel: "Ich bin überzeugt, wenn man die Geschichte irgendeines Hauses erzählte, dem Leben seiner Einwohner nachginge, ihre Charaktere erforschte und die Ereignisse beschriebe, die sich in dem Haus zugetragen haben, ein sozialer Roman entstünde, der vielleicht bedeutender wäre als die Romane von Balzac" (90). The social network that holds *Number 5* together is further delineated in the next chapter.

Sometimes too I heard their toilet flush, so that I would blush imagining Harry's moans and mine resounding in rooms so recently empty, and even still on occasion I would come over all self-conscious when perched on our own toilet seat. (To hear me talk you'd think I'd been brought up in a palace and not a two-up, two-down, but either the walls were thinner here or the air there was thicker with other sound.) (N5 15)

The woman experiences the paradox of sharing fleeting but most private moments with either complete or at least relative strangers, and her physical environment causes the private to become public as the two spheres can no longer be kept apart.<sup>38</sup>

As Stella struggles with suburban materiality she relates the physical conditions to social norms she is expected to observe. The women are to stay at home and look after the house while the men go out and earn money, without exception. As Ivy puts it: "If our fellas had wanted mill girls I'm sure they could have found them" (N5 28). The normative character of this life model is underlined by the interchangeable design of the houses in the estate. "We are going to put a carpet in here," Ivy said, tapping her toe on the lino, which covered this and every floor in the house, this and every house in the street. 'And Denis is going to paper the first Saturday he's off'" (N5 10). Built exactly the same, the houses cater for very particular needs. They function as a determining environment that purports a way of life, which is to be followed in order to keep the neighbourhood homogeneous.<sup>39</sup> These normative social expectations are underlined by the physical appearance of the houses in the estate. Alterations to the houses are permitted, but they are kept to a minimum and manifest themselves mainly in small trivia. "There were, though, I noticed, other plates mounted on the walls between the cupboards and appliances, with bits of verse on them, a recipe

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<sup>38</sup> Stella is certainly the character most intimidated by the sensation of being cooped up in close proximity to other persons, but decades later Catriona entertains similar feelings, when she witnesses one of her neighbours through the adjoining bathroom windows and feels at the same time very close to and yet removed from him: "Beyond the garden and its mirror image, in the bathroom of the house that backed on to ours an indistinct man made careful passes with a comb across his head. There was a six-foot-high fence between our gardens. I had never spoken to this man, wouldn't have been 100 per cent sure I would recognize him if I saw him on the street, without the filter of frosted glass" (N5 208).

<sup>39</sup> Linden Peach observes the power of the prescribed concept of life Stella struggles with and states "the internalization of socially conceived images should be a determining force in the construction of individual identities" (12).

for soda bread, shamrock and shillelagh, a portrait of Edward VIII. Such were the things that made one house begin to look unlike another” (N5 38). The neighbourhood appears generic, almost bland. The houses themselves could be positioned in any suburban layout. In the description of the estate Patterson stresses Belfast’s normality and incorporates it into a European urbanity. Only the individual touches of their inhabitants (however small) personalise the houses and turn them into homes.<sup>40</sup>

Stella’s sceptical attitude and her ambiguous relationship to her home and her neighbourhood introduce a nonconformist aspect into the narrative. Stella begins to rebel against the closed society that does not permit any deviation. But her rebellion is a slow and painful development that is closely tied to the physicality of the house. There are times when she revels in the tasks the house sets her, and there are others when she cannot bear to fulfil them.

Some days I would go from room to room, with my vacuum and my duster and my tin of polish, and feel like the chief engineer, alert to every speck of dirt that might foul up the vessel’s smooth running. Other days I spent half my morning on the floor of our bedroom, listening to the distant sounds of building work, becalmed. (N5 18)

One moment she feels safe in its walls, and then again she is lost in thought and drifts away out of the house and its boundaries to an imaginary world, just as her mother, who was tied up at home all her life, had always done: “My mother had a bad accident when she was a girl, walking was difficult for her, but she would not let the fate that she was not able physically stop her seeing the world. The imagination, she always maintained, was the best form of transport known to woman or man” (N5 20). How much Stella unconsciously relies on her imagination to escape the confinement of the house becomes apparent in the following quotation: “I counted the bricks in each row. I contemplated calculating the number of bricks that had gone into the making of the whole house and then I have no idea where I went, but the next thing I was aware of was rain hitting the

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<sup>40</sup> These personal trivia sometimes offer the only clues towards the religion the occupants of the house were born into. Patterson subverts the binary understanding of Northern Irish society by positing Catholics and Protestants in identical houses, only to be distinguished by a picture of Edward VIII or a shamrock on the wall.



kitchen window” (N5 42). Before the bricks of the house and thus the material substance of the place can dominate her mind, Stella involuntarily imagines herself free of it and in her mind leaves the physical confines of Number 5 behind.

While the young woman maintains an ambiguous relationship to the house and increasingly perceives it as a prison, for the Tans Number 5 represents a safe haven from an alien and often hostile outside world. As an immigrant family the Tans face racism and prejudice against them on a regular basis. In public space they are most vulnerable and need to be constantly alert for verbal or even physical attacks. Even everyday activities sometimes become a struggle, because cultural and linguistic barriers impede a daily routine and weigh heavy on the family’s mind. The mother, for example, still has trouble with the local dialect. “English was one of four languages she spoke, but sometimes she had difficulty understanding people here (‘what is it they *do* to words?’) so that she began to doubt her own intelligence and lapsed into something close to pidgin” (N5 126). For all the insecurity the Tans experience in public space, the privacy of their home becomes more important to them, and so they react particularly sensitively to any infringement of their own space. Where this space begins, however, is not unmistakably regulated. As a neighbour interferes with their front lawn decorations, once again the distinction between public space and private space dissolves and normative social expectations within the estate come to the fore. Father and son try to plant some sunflowers on their front lawns, but the woman passing their house stops them:

“It isn’t a vegetable patch,” she said.  
“They’re sunflowers,” said my father.  
“I don’t know what you’re used with,” the woman carried on over the top of him,  
“but if you want to grow vegetables in this country get an allotment.” (N5 123)

In this short quotation a number of aspects of Belfast suburban life are addressed. Firstly, the inherent prejudices against an immigrant family become apparent, something I look at more closely in the following chapter. Secondly, just as the façade of the International Hotel already belongs to the streets adjoining it, the parts of the house facing the streets constitute by no means a private space, but are already considered as public space that needs to be treated as such and is subject

to certain rules.<sup>41</sup> Thirdly, as the variety of front lawn decorations within the estate is severely limited, Number 5 presents itself as a determined environment, where the physical space is tied to very specific uses and significations. Because of both this ambiguous definition of the front lawn and the relatively harmless rudeness of the neighbour this incident might be perceived as unimportant and only a minor infringement of the Tans' private space. The next quotation, however, puts it in context with other violations and incorporates it into a series of brutal intrusions. In the middle of the night the Tan family congregates in the hallway after a plate of shit has been thrust into their home through the letter box:

My sisters pinched their noses, my father began softly to cry, drowned by the sound of feet running down the front path, of laughter, long-held, escaping, the letterbox snapping shut.

I watched the smeared plate follow its cargo to the hall carpet and already I knew that we would not talk about this, inside the house or out, any more than we talked about the piss-filled milk bottles left on the doorstep night after night, about the eggs thrown, about the uprooted plants the sunflowers were intended to replace. We would clean up again in silence and under cover of darkness and when the street awoke the neighbours would find us as we were when they – or most of them – went to sleep. Only in this way could we go on living among them, by not letting them see what was done to us. (N5 124)

Such are the psychological consequences of the violations that the Tans' only solution is to pretend they never happened. They hide their humiliation from the neighbours whenever they can, a strategy that is not always viable. On one occasion the Tans' house is advertised as for sale in the local paper without the family's knowledge. The act indicates their continued role as outsiders and shows that they are barely tolerated within the estate. As a consequence a potential buyer turns up at the Tans' doorstep, forces his way into the house and demands to be shown around. The mother is shocked and overwhelmed by this most immediate and threatening violation of her private space, and she can no longer contain herself. "Through the open front door my mother saw Mrs Moore come down her

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<sup>41</sup> This is also the reason why Stella hesitates to sit in the sun on her front lawn. The front lawns of the houses constitute part of public space, and she considers this tantamount to sitting in the street (N5 22) – an act closely associated with the working-class society of Belfast. Many of the normative social expectations within the estate exist so that its inhabitants can demarcate themselves from the lower rungs of society and establish themselves as a middle class. The rules are particularly adhered to in Stella's time because the ascent into the Belfast suburbs is so freshly achieved and not yet perceived as secured.

path. She ran outside waving her arms. ‘Help,’ she said. ‘Make him leave.’” (N5 128). The continuous intrusion into the Tans’ home and the family’s shocked and humiliated reactions to it illustrate the function of the house for the Chinese immigrants: it constitutes a safe haven, a sanctuary from the hostility they endure in public. Within the walls of Number 5 the family members are amongst themselves and are not cast for the role of outsiders. Social rules permitting, they can also adjust the house to their needs.

This aspect of the physical space of Number 5 is alluded to in the father’s attempts to build an additional room in the attic; it recurs again when the Eliots, having moved in after the Tans, turn the front lawn into a car parking space; yet it becomes most apparent while Tony and Mel live in the house. For them, and especially for Tony, the building really is a blank canvas on which to project their way of life and identity. During the 1990s they fashion the house solely to their needs and tastes, recreating the space with their actions and ideas. This relentless reworking of the house is almost too much to bear for Ivy. She, who still remembers the original version of the house and has lived in a similar model for more than four decades, cannot understand the need for this radical change: “Ivy never walked through here but her head seemed, almost imperceptibly, to shake in contemplation of the floors, the exposed staircase, walls taken back to brick: what are you, *unbuilding* the place?” (N5 253) Ultimately the only thing the house keeps throughout its existence is the original number.

The physical space of Number 5 encompasses durability and change, the public as well as the private. It functions as prison but also as safe house. It can represent a determined environment but also a blank space waiting to be inscribed with meaning and moulded into shape. In short, the material setting of the novel never stays the same but constantly changes and develops. Not only its appearance but also its functions and meanings are heterogeneous as they adapt to the myriad of stories that are told within the text. “The location may be singular, yet each occupant’s sense of place and their corresponding idea of identity is shown to be different” (Alcobia-Murphy 118). Shane Alcobia-Murphy directly relates the physicality of *Number 5* to the sociality Patterson creates. Quoting Massey’s *Space, Place and Gender*, the critic states that the novel “demonstrates

that place depends on the co-presence there of specific ‘sets of social relations’” (118).

Because the building presents the central setting within the urban novel, the propensity for multiple meanings and constant development involuntarily colours the imagery of the textual city created in Glenn Patterson’s *Number 5*. Belfast exhibits manifold aspects and dimensions as it caters for the innumerable narratives that define its urban space. Its plethora of micronarratives and their topical normality, but above all generic description of the house and its neighbourhood, including the nonspecific street names such as “high road”, “low road” and “main road” (N5 16), turn the urban environment into an ‘Everycity’ and the house into an ‘Everyhouse’, establishing a relationship to the everyday urbanity in other major cities.

### **Urban Environment**

The urban space of Patterson’s novels is not only defined by the manmade constructions of the city, by its buildings and streets. The lie of the land, the Lagan as well as the surrounding countryside also influence the image of Belfast in the novels. In this context the city does not always remain urban, but stretches to encompass its rural environment. In accordance with the frequently utilized means of deconstructing apparent binarisms, the borders between the urban and the rural, while at times scrupulously maintained, are also frequently dissolved. *Fat Lad*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* acknowledge the city limits but also transgress and displace them in the context of their narratives. The urban and its boundaries are presented as unstable and flexible, establishing the city, once again, not as an unchanging environment but an organism that constantly develops and is influenced by and interacts with its surroundings. Because individuals carry unique images of the city and attribute the landscape with subjective meaning, the city incorporates numerous sometimes contradictory facets. Rather than a single, limiting representation, many coexist democratically in Patterson’s novels giving room to both positive and negative connotations.

In *Fat Lad* a young Ellen constructs a striking differentiation between the familiarity and safety of the city and the unknown wilderness of the neighbouring mountains. Used to a regulated urban environment and the manageable size of the English estate she was born into, Belfast's rural surroundings and their new home's proximity to it frighten the little girl, despite the familiarity with which her father moves within the two poles of the opposition:

Whereas in Romford he had seldom been known to walk further than the bus-stop at the end of the road, in Belfast he set out alone every Sunday afternoon to walk his dinner off in the hills, which reared up blunt against the roof-lines of the streets beyond Granny Linden's. [...] But Ellen worried about him up there on his own and when, one Saturday in autumn, he still had not come home long after dark, she petrified herself with gruesome imaginings, fuelled by the names of the mountains themselves: *Cave Hill*, *Wolf Hill*, *Black Mountain*. (FL 38)

While Ellen fantasises about a brutal nature attacking her father and puts the rural scenery in stark and dark contrast to the safe cityscape of her home, Drew as a young boy frequently transgresses the borders with his dad and thus incorporates the mountains into his image of the city.

*When you can't see the Black Mountain, it means it's raining; when you can, it means it's going to rain.*

A Belfast proverb. Bum-bumping philosophy. Not so much spoken and heard as transmitted direct from bone to bone, ground into him as he lurched, half-asleep, down the Whiterock Road on Sunday afternoons, an outcrop of his father's head, with his hair tufted into tiny, fist-sized handles where Drew, waking in a whiplash panic, clung from time to time to keep from jolting off his shoulders. (FL 45)

In naming the road that leads into the mountains from the city, the rural is connected to the urban through the spatial conditions. Black Mountain becomes part of Belfast in the proverb heading the citation, as it constitutes public knowledge and helps to establish the elevation as a Belfast landmark not only in Drew's but in a communal imaginary of the city. Furthermore, the two quotes read in relation display two startlingly opposing symbolisms. Ellen's associations with the mountains are wild and dark. The names become synonymous with the perils waiting there for her father. Drew, on the other hand, experiences the trips into nature from the safety of his father's shoulders. So, while Ellen is left at home worrying, Drew is protected by his father's presence and strength. The boy

does not refer to Black Mountain, but in his memory the pair wanders along Whiterock Road. The use of light colour creates the impression of an afternoon stroll in an inviting and friendly environment. In congruence with the diverging relationships Ellen and Drew develop towards the city, the young Drew puts forward the positive picture while his sister propounds a negative view of everything to do with the city. This perception of Belfast will reverse when the children grow into adults, and the dark symbolism of Black Mountain, Wolf Hill and Cave Hill could easily be constructed by Drew when he first returns to his hometown to work for The Bookstore. The siblings' respective developments stand in direct opposition to each other. While Ellen's sentiments move from refusal to eventual acceptance of Belfast as her home, Drew makes that journey the other way round. He grows up in the belief that the city, or his parents' coming back to it, was the reason he was born. It is the family's belief that England would not grant them the wish of a son, but Northern Ireland did. While Ellen becomes accustomed to their lives in Belfast, however, Drew during his childhood grows more and more distant, trying to shut himself off both from the domestic violence he experiences and from the public violence from which the city suffers. By the time he is ready to leave for university, the young man is utterly disgusted with his home and vows never to come back, if he can help it. The life stories of the two siblings run oddly contrary to each other, emphasising the complexity of their relationship. The whole family, despite seeming a unity to outsiders, consists of a number of individuals with highly personalised life stories.

Moving on in the narrative, however, it is a sign of Drew's very own peace process, which he experiences in relation to Belfast, that the mountains are part of one of his first positively attributed views of the city coming back from a daytrip to Dublin:

Drew recalled an unexpected elation earlier as the train rattled along the last few miles of the vulnerable cord that was the cross-border rail line and entered Belfast through the southern opening in its surrounding skull of hills – capped this evening with preposterously lovely, red-rinsed bouffant clouds. He was glad then that he had gone to Dublin, but gladder still that he had returned when he did, feeling that, despite his lingering confusion, he had succeeded in pulling himself back from a more tortuous involvement, and forgetting for the moment that the place he had

pulled back to was the place which formerly he had been trying to pull back *from*.  
(FL 217)

In *Fat Lad* the rural surroundings of Belfast are portrayed both as part of the city and in opposition to the urban, they are presented in a negative as well as a positive light, further emphasising the many faces and imaginaries of the city, as well as the subjectivity and volatile nature of urban perception. In the course of his life Drew's image of Belfast travels from a positive to an utterly negative image, back to one laced with forgiveness and acceptance.

Similarly, Belfast's very substance, the bedrock on which the city is built, carries good as well as bad connotations for the different characters in *Fat Lad*. Hugh McManus, fellow expat and Northern Ireland sceptic, comments scathingly on the city's substratum: "The whole of Belfast city centre was built on mudflats, exposed, centuries before, by the retreating lough: sleet, in the local idiom, or, the word Hugh preferred, slobland" (FL 20). The contemptuous remark tallies with Hugh's perception of Belfast. He sees the whole city invested with the poison of the Troubles and its society stuck in the mud of bigotry. Drew's casual lover Kay on the other hand paints a completely different picture of the city and its material and imaginary foundations. In a scene that includes the longest and most detailed description of the city centre and its meshwork of streets and squares, Kay lectures Drew's boss James on her version of the city and its foundations. The English businessman has never been to Belfast before and would like to see "a few of the sights" (FL 224). Drew immediately feels the need to ask Kay to point out the positive aspects of the city to James, so as not to let the cityscape of the Troubles constitute James' image of Belfast:

A few of the sights. Drew brought the teacup to his mouth, surprised to discover that he still harboured something of the old suspicions of these words; the distaste for tourists, common to those of his background, who knew that all too often seeing a few of the sights involved nothing more than a ghoulisn fairground ride up the Shankill and down the Falls, gawping at murals and fortified bars, having the potentially life-saving nuances of the rival black taxi services explained and a murderous significance ascribed to every street corner, public house and patch of waste ground. The *this was where* and the *over there* of twenty years of violence. You could find anything you wanted if you went looking for it, and you only had to go looking in any direction other than narrowly west in Belfast to find a different city altogether. (FL 224)

Once again the text emphasises the city's multifaceted character, which can never be grasped completely. While a tour with Hugh would probably include a lot of 'this was where' and 'over there' to back up the image of the Belfast he propounds, Kay, with Drew's endorsement, chooses to show a much more positive and contemporary face of the city and imparts her own urban imaginary onto James. In Kay's opinion, the fact that the muddy land has been turned into a capital city already stands as a symbol for Belfast's many achievements and the industriousness and stamina of its inhabitants. For James' benefit she takes on the role of the passionate tour guide and the city's ambassador and lawyer.<sup>42</sup>

They went Donegall Quay, Queen's Square, Custom House Square, Tomb Street. A rubbly route, but elevated by the Custom House itself and interrupted at intervals by new architectural growth. James commented on the amount of building he'd seen already on his way from the airport. He had expected to see more... well, more destruction, frankly.

The battle between *destruction* and *construction*, Kay told him, warming to her guide's role, was the oldest battle in Belfast. The congenital predisposition of various of its inhabitants for periodically dismantling the city had been matched at every turn by the efforts of those who, against this and other, even more elemental enemies, had struggled throughout its history to build it up. Men (for men, in the past they invariably were) who had looked at mudflats and seen shipping channels, had looked at water and seen land. Belfast as a city was a triumph over mud and water, the dream of successive generations of merchants, engineers, and entrepreneurs willed into being. They had had to build the land before they could work it. Dredging, scouring, banking, consolidating, they fashioned a city in their own image: dry docks, graving docks, ships, cranes, kilns, silos; industry from their industry, solidity from the morass, leaving an indelible imprint on the unpromising slobland, and their names driven like screw-piles into the city's sense of itself.

Dargan, Dunbar, Workman, Wolff, Harland...

[...]

– You'll hear a lot of talk here about stolen land, she said.

James already had.

– Well, it's all true. Were we're standing now...

They had arrived in Corporation Square, facing the Liverpool ferry terminal.

– Where we're standing now is stolen land. And all that over there – (Queen's Island, the shipyard) – is stolen land: stolen from the sea.

– I'd never thought of it like that, James said.

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<sup>42</sup> Laura Pelaschiar particularly stresses the modern and innovative perspective of a self-confident woman: "[D]etermined to reveal to him a city which he certainly does not expect to find, she proceeds in her mission with pride and stubbornness. Through the history of the origins of Belfast itself, a strong, powerful and likeable female character voices her (new) version of Irish history, a history which she (and Glenn Patterson through her voice) describes with almost biblical tones and rhythms" (*Writing the North* 102).



– You and fifty million others, she said, in that Kay way that was impossible to take exception to. (FL 224-6)

For Kay, the cultivation of the muddy fields does not constitute a negative characteristic but demonstrates the ingenuity and endurance the inhabitants of the city have shown over generations in order to develop their home. It is “a metaphor for the ever-changing city striving to update itself” (Bovone 18). Kay and Hugh highlight different aspects of the city that fit their preferred image of it. *Fat Lad* combines opposing imaginaries and stresses the multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory character of the city.

In *That Which Was* limited perceptions of the city become apparent in a similar vein to those images the young Ellen and the young Drew carry within them, when Avery takes some children of his parish to a cross-community football tournament into the suburbs. Like Ellen, the boys and girls, who leave the neighbourhood they know maybe even for the first time, are intimidated by the unfamiliarity of the landscape, and they have difficulty to accept their surroundings as part of their city.

The argument carried on until the bus had turned south on the Outer Ring Road and passed the Forestside shopping centre, then the silence descended. Even for those who had been this far, here, two miles out of town from their houses, was the limit of the familiar world. Avery was reminded that for all their furious phoning and texting, his children were really only talking to themselves.

The rain had eased to merely heavy when the twenty-three kids, decidedly less boisterous, got off the bus two miles further on, outside the pavilion of the sports grounds, laid out at the top of a gentle slope down the Lagan. (One of Avery’s younger children refused to accept that this was the same river that flowed through the city centre.) (TWW 42-43)

Belfast’s heterogeneous facets comprise urban as well as rural settings. Avery’s mental image differs substantially from that of the children, because he, unlike them, journeys through the city on a regular basis and sees it from different perspectives. The boys and girls, however, rarely venture outside their neighbourhood and accept only the limited surroundings of the estate and the centre of the city as parts of Belfast. The new perspective stumps and unsettles them, as the city all of a sudden becomes an incalculable and unknown

environment to them. The different manifestations of the Lagan symbolise the versatility of the urban environment. They show the fluidity of the boundaries between urban and rural, as well as the city's ability to constantly change and shift.

References to the city boundaries in *Number 5* highlight this aspect of the urban too. The construction of the estate around the house illustrates urban expansion and shows how the rural hinterland is incorporated into the urban through time, an aspect of Patterson's urban imagination that I address again in the chapter on the temporal dimension. Stella is born and bred in a city-centre environment. Therefore, and not unlike the children in *That Which Was*, she feels she has long left the familiarity of the city behind her, when she first visits the estate: "We had such a walk to get here from the bus terminus, far beyond anything Harry or I knew of the city. [...] I say 'street', but maybe that is overdoing it. 'Clearing' would be closer" (N5 5). *Number 5* paints the distinction between urban and rural as anything but clearly definable on a spatial level. On the contrary, transitions are presented as fluid, and different characters draw different boundaries. Artie, the real-estate agent to initially sell the houses in the neighbourhood, advertises the estate as a suburban gem, while Stella cannot shake off the feeling of having left behind the city on the way to her new home. However, she already anticipates that Belfast will eventually stretch to encompass the neighbourhood: "Some day the land between the high road, the low road and the main road would all have been filled in" (N5 16).

### **Borders, Interfaces, Segregated Spaces**

The characters in Glenn Patterson's novels are not only aware of the city boundaries and the distinction between rural and urban, but also of borders within the city. Sectarian violence and political unrest divide Belfast into a plethora of sections and zones. Although none of the novels emphasises the Troubles as a central aspect of the city, these events nevertheless contribute to the imagery of Belfast. They structure the urban spatiality and invest street names and neighbourhoods with meaning. Sectarian boundaries and religiously divided areas

play a role, and names that have become synonymous with the Troubles are utilized to point towards the spatial setting of the conflict. But wherever sectarian divisions appear in the novels, their constructedness and permeability constitute an important aspect of their description. Patterson subordinates the Troubles' spatial markers to the same principles as the rest of his urbanity. Nothing is fixed, but everything changes. Boundaries are never set in stone, and the possibility of subversion always exists.

In *The International*, set before the start of Troubles, a mental image of sectarian divisions starts to form in the characters' minds and gives new meaning to the urban space of Belfast. The development becomes apparent in repeated allusions to Malvern Street off the Shankill Road. Here, four barmen of The International Hotel were attacked because of their religion as they saw out the time after work in a pub. Peter Ward died that night, and Danny, who has succeeded Peter in the Blue Bar, is particularly aware of how the murder has changed the perception of that area of town within the hotel: "The Shankill Road, Malvern Street in particular, was sensitive" (TI 171). Shortly after the time the novel is set the area and its immediate environment becomes famous in the context of the Troubles as a Protestant working-class area and loyalist stronghold where violence occurs frequently. In the late 1960s the city is changing. Sectarian interfaces become noticeable and structure the urban space into zones. This reputation that certain street names gain during the Troubles already informs Danny's story. The narrative structure, which has the protagonist recount the events in retrospect 30 years removed from the action, and which allows for frequent allusions to further developments within Northern Ireland, ensures that future history already infiltrates the relative innocence of 1967. In this context streets are attributed with new meanings that connect them to the conflict and allocate them to one of two political camps. This narrative technique in *The International* serves to foreshadow sectarian boundaries; however, it also emphasises their constructedness. It shows that the political and sectarian meanings have not always been present but have developed over time. Therefore, the city is not portrayed as a closed-off system, whose zones are an immutable aspect of it.

Rather, the beginnings of the interfaces are described and with this a potential end is implied. Furthermore, the interfaces are still permeable in *The International* and sectarian boundaries can still be crossed.

Partly, those boundaries already firmly in existence in 1967 are construed not by the city's inhabitants but by its officials. The lines are impressed upon Belfast citizens from above and do not evolve within the urban community. Danny directly addresses this phenomenon in the context of Ingrid's story.

[Ingrid's fiancé's] parents had had their name on a council waiting list since they were married and each time a child was born they called at the council offices to see were they any closer to the top of the list, but always it seemed there were people whose need was more urgent. It wasn't that there were no council houses to be had, there were, just not in Joe's parents' part of town. And it wasn't that Joe's parents cared particularly which part of town they lived in, they didn't care about anything beyond getting a house of their own; but the council cared, the council cared very much. The council had ward boundaries to think of, majorities to return where no majorities existed. I was a hard old job, people didn't know the half of it. Ingrid was not stupid, though you didn't need to be especially clever to see that more than one local government in Northern Ireland could not have stood without the aid of substantial rigging, even so she was staggered by the cold calculation that crammed two families – three generations, four children and five adults – into one house. (TI 150)

The quote alludes to the then customary practise in Northern Ireland of gerrymandering, employed to ensure Protestant representation even in predominantly Catholic districts. In stressing the council's key role as the structuring agent and commenting on the effort it takes to maintain the boundaries, Danny emphasises their constructedness. He implies that, if left to the city's inhabitants, the boundaries would have shifted or dissolved but certainly not have remained fixed. In this instance, the dynamics of urban space are forcefully disabled, and Belfast is artificially brought into a deadlock situation by an official body that is set in opposition to the ordinary inhabitants of Belfast. Political calculation enforces an artificial stability onto the city that runs contrary to the urban characteristics of flexibility and change.

Ironically *Number 5*, Glenn Patterson's only novel that covers the most intensive time of the Troubles, includes fewest references to the conflict. In the 1970s and

1980s Belfast suffered most seriously under paramilitary violence. However, no spatial markers of the Troubles, such as places of heavy street fighting, barricades or army checkpoints, which in those days divided the public space of Belfast between Catholic and Protestant areas, make it into *Number 5*. As I have already pointed out earlier, the urban imaginary the characters of the novel put forth is limited to the estate and its immediate neighbourhood. Merely the young Tan ventures outside of it, and he does so only a couple of times in the narrative. Rodney on the other hand, living in the house during the 1970s, looks at the main street adjacent to the estate as the border of the world he is familiar with. Other areas of the town, where the conflict is carried out in the streets, are not part of Rodney's urban experience. He knows about these areas theoretically and discusses the events taking place both on the streets and on a political level at length, but no direct point of contact exists. In *Number 5* Glenn Patterson marginalises the constricting effect the Troubles have on the urban spatiality and instead focuses on the city as a changing and developing environment brought to life by its inhabitants.

It is in the novels *Fat Lad* and *That Which Was*, in which characters travel more widely through Belfast, that sectarian interfaces and inner city boundaries influence the imagery of the textual city again. However, both narratives are set after the Good Friday Agreement, during a time in which Belfast transforms at breakneck speed and strives to leave the violent conflict behind. Thus, *Fat Lad* in the 1990s and *That Which Was* in the early years of the new millennium both depict a city characterised by its history on the one hand and pointing towards its future on the other. Sectarian boundaries appear as both urban realities and dated relics from the past.

*That Which Was* depicts North Belfast as the part of town most tied up in sectarian warfare both during the heyday of the Troubles and the years of the peace process. Avery sees the area in stark contrast to the rest of the city:

North Belfast was not so much another country as another continent. In comparison with its myriad of internal borders the sectarian divides in the east and west were as clear-cut as the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. While he was still assistant in Holywood

Avery had been asked to entertain a colleague from England, in town for the General Assembly and requesting a tour of the city. Avery, coming in by bypass and motorway, started in the north at the sectarian roulette wheel that is Carlisle Circus. Twenty-five minutes later – the Crumlin Road later, Ardoyne, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Limestone Road, Tiger's Bay, North Queen Street, enclave within enclave later – he was approaching the junction again, intending to take the turn for the Shankill and all points west, when his passenger asked could he be dropped off in the city centre. He had a bit of shopping to do. Avery apologized for not fitting more in, he hadn't realized they were so pressed for time.

I didn't say, said the Englishman. But don't worry, you showed me plenty. He touched Avery's hand, like sorry for your troubles. Really, he said, I've seen enough.

North Belfast had peace lines in public parks. When political storm clouds gathered, it was a fair bet they would empty first over north Belfast. Even before the millennium, even before the peace process, north Belfast now and again seemed like another century. (TWW 135)

By allocating North Belfast to both another continent and another century, the quotation demarcates the area spatially as well as temporally from the rest of the city. What is more, it subdivides North Belfast again and turns it into a maze of sectarian boundary lines, presenting the area as an unmanageable complex entity that can hardly be comprehended as such. This sectarian maze of North Belfast appears to have been constructed solely by chance. To emphasise the arbitrariness of the boundaries and the impossibility of controlling them, the narrator evokes the image of a roulette wheel. In portraying North Belfast as part of the city and yet separating it from it at the same time, the text defines the city not as one homogenous space, but establishes it as a plethora of small entities that come together to form the heterogeneous multiplicity that is the city. Additionally it stresses the fact that the city, or even a small part of it, cannot be grasped in its entirety but always remains open to new aspects and meanings. The Englishman Avery is driving around Belfast has 'seen enough'. He has made up his mind about the character of the city and yet he fails to see another face of Belfast which would have put the signs of the Troubles into context. On his way back home Avery realizes: "That was the other thing about North Belfast, there were few parts of the city – of any city Avery could think of on the island – more beautiful" (TWW 135).

In *That Which Was* Patterson allows paramilitary violence more room than in any other of his novels. However, the text focuses on a violence that occurs not

between the Catholic and Protestant denominations but within the supposedly unified Protestant community, deconstructing not only perceived spatial unities but also the pervasive binarism that divides the city into only two opposing groups (Schwerter 229). The loyalist feuding that threatens to disturb large parts of the city repeatedly emerges from the background of the novel, reminding readers that even the new millennium has not brought uninterrupted peace to Belfast. “The Shankill Road had split in the middle. The UDA had claimed the lower end, the UVF the upper” (TWW 46). The text underlines the futility of the fighting, and thus also the futility of the corresponding spatial demarcation, in several ways. The two opposing parties are supposed to belong to the same side, those of Loyalist activists. To underscore this fact no one in *That Which Was* either distinguishes between the two paramilitary groupings or deems it important to do so. They regard the six letters as different abbreviations for essentially the same thing. “UDA, UVF. I’m not sure which crowd exactly” (TWW 195). The two organisations become interchangeable and the spatial boundaries arbitrary. The Shankill Road, formerly perceived as a Protestant unity, splits in two, displaying not only the artificial constructedness of these spatial demarcations, but also that they remain volatile and subject to change.

Furthermore, the text denies the feud any legitimacy by exaggerating it into grotesque and pointless dimensions. “Supporters of one or the other – their relatives, their friends, *their milkmen*, it seemed – caught on the wrong side of the divide were being encouraged to leave by having their houses wrecked, their belongings strewn about the street” (TWW 46). In *That Which Was* this new opposition between two Protestant formations becomes as all-encompassing as the binarism between Protestants and Catholics, and neutrality becomes impossible. The example of the milkmen serves to catapult the conflict into a senseless space of insanity, denying first the loyalist binarism and by extension the denominational binarism their legitimacy. Patterson subverts the religious binarism in Belfast by introducing a new opposition and establishing it as farce (Schwerter 30).

Nearer to Avery’s home in the east of the city, spatial demarcations are as apparent as in the Shankill Road or North Belfast, as “[t]he big worry was that the

feud would spread across the river to east Belfast” (TWW 46). Flags are flown from windows and houses, indicating the areas involved. These territorial markers not only divide the urban space into opposing camps, they also function as instruments in the paramilitary battle for dominance “The sectarian interfaces remained ugly. The flags that traditionally came down at the end of July stayed up, a disagreement, it appeared, between loyalist terror groups over who should remove theirs first” (TWW 31).

However, the flags and the feuds by no means take over the entire city. The text pits certain parts of the town that bear obvious signs of the Troubles against others, where the conflict is no longer noticeable, but where a renewed and newly invented Belfast reigns. A group of German tourists, who Avery runs into, experiences this multi-faceted urbanity first hand when wandering through the city:

As he walked back to the car he was hailed by group of tourists carrying precautionary Pacamacs. German, up from Dublin for the day, their spokesman explained and handed Avery a map. Waterfront Hall? he asked.

Avery traced the route with his finger. We are here, it is there.

He told them there was an even bigger arena, the Odyssey, now being built just across the mouth of the Lagan from the Waterfront. Worth a look at least.

The tourists thanked him, began moving off, map like a divining rod before them. The spokesman hung back a little. I was wondering, he said, as awkwardly as if he had been talking to a pimp, not a Presbyterian minister, where is *everything*, you know?

Avery knew. Walk half a mile in any direction from here, he said, you’ll come across something.

I’m sorry. You don’t mind me asking?

No, said Avery, conscious that in Berlin, Belfast’s erstwhile wall-twin, he might ask the same thing. (TWW 17-8)

Sectarian murals and the Waterfront Hall, paramilitary flags and the Odyssey: symbols of a past Belfast and a future one come together to form a lively and complex image of the city, in which the Troubles are not omitted but do not hold a central position either. Rather, the conflict is incorporated within the urban landscape and constitutes only one of many aspects of the city. The juxtaposition of past processes and developments pointing towards the future establish the city as a place in progress, as the influence of the Troubles is superseded by new currents.



Thematically the religious binarism that begins to inform the spatial demarcation in *The International* and is exposed as utterly constructed in *That Which Was* features in *Fat Lad* as well. But the text does not merge mutually exclusive categories, proving this exclusiveness void. Neither does it include manifold attempts to overcome the oppositions, or introduce third alternatives that open up new possibilities. In this novel the topic is largely tied to the spatial perception of the minor character of Hugh McManus, who ferociously repudiates the binary ideology. Studying in England, Drew is initially drawn to Hugh because the scathing contempt the latter scorches his home with mirrors his own. For the two, Belfast epitomizes the exclusive binarism that they regard to be utterly void of sense and legitimacy. Trying to distance themselves from Northern Ireland as much as they can, but at the same time unable to remain unconcerned by the events in their home, they attack and sneer at everyone who takes a side in the conflict. The “earnest boys who stood every Thursday on the steps of the Union building, with their Harringtons, number one crewcuts, and armfuls of Troops Out papers, bellowing in best Home Counties accents: —Support the revolution in Ireland!” (FL 2) constitute no exception. Hugh’s reaction summarises his attitude towards the binarism in Northern Ireland and it also shows his contempt that finally moves him to “get *involved* again” (FL 253):

Hugh McManus, final-year law, guiding light and *ex-iest* of all the Expats, had harangued them, solo, one famous rainy Thursday, challenging them to define their terms – What revolution? What *Ireland*? – and cutting to pieces each glib formulation with a flourish of his free hand [...], till they [...] were reduced to shouts of *Paisleyite!* And *Fascist!* Hugh McManus. The son of Belfast’s foremost Catholic solicitors. The brilliant Hugh McManus, shot to death last year at age twenty-nine by a gunman, or gunmen, unknown, following his successful defence of Father Fiacc, the Liverpool priest (dubbed Father Fear by the tabloids) accused of plotting to assassinate the Environment Secretary on a visit to a Merseyside garden fête. (FL 2)

The quotation shows the force of the existing binarism. The ‘earnest boys’ subscribing to it imperatively need to place Hugh in one of the categories, and as he attacks those who support the cause of the IRA, he automatically becomes a “Paisleyite”, a ruthless supporter of the Loyalists’ concerns. The utter irony in this

categorisation escapes them. Hugh is not only Catholic but will later in his career gain fame because he defends a suspected IRA collaborator. Subscribing to the binarism means denying the possibility of neutrality, denying the possibility that someone refuses to belong to either of the two categories and that they pride themselves in this refusal. Hugh equates this with the spatial demarcations that pervade the city when he philosophises about a chance encounter at a Belfast security gate with a soldier who curses him because of his defence of Father Fiacc: “[I]n that land of excluded middles you were either one thing or the other, one of us or one of them, for or against, inside or out” (FL 247). He is not allowed to occupy some middle ground, because an opposition must always be maintained:

A gate let into a fence, a person within, a person without, a gun, and a bagful of legal papers.

Their present distribution was only one of several Hugh could envisage: the person without, for example, could have the gun (i.e. might) and the person within, the papers (right); or the person within (or without) could have might and right both; or neither. The only configuration that was not permissible was the two people simultaneously within (or without, it didn’t matter which) *with* the gun *and* the papers. For it was in the nature of enclosing that it included one thing and excluded another (*any* other) and to have the two people on the same side of the fence *with* the papers *and* the gun would make a nonsense of the fence, to say nothing of the papers and the gun. A nonsense, in fact, of the mind’s attempts to maintain a distinction between them. (FL 248)

In this little play of possibilities Hugh exposes the limits of the binary oppositions that become apparent in the spatial order of the city centre and their ultimate flaw. As soon as one side bridges the divide, the categories collapse completely and the distinctions fade away. This is why the rule to fit everyone without exception into the categories is vital for the continuity of such binarisms. Boundaries must remain at all costs, otherwise the binarism collapses. While they are kept intact, no alternative seems possible, although people who do not fit the categories do exist. Hugh remembers a court case about a shooting incident. A man was killed by two soldiers because they thought him to be a republican terrorist. “The coroner [...] noted that at the time of the incident the deceased had been walking with the aid of a stick, the legacy of an IRA kneecapping for previous *anti-social behaviour*. Even Otherness has its Others” (FL 248).

Despite the fact that the text portrays Belfast as a city on the rise, redefining itself after the worst of the violence seems to have been left in the past, *Fat Lad* still grants the binarism between Protestant and Catholic an imperative influence that nobody can withdraw from completely. The murder of the kneecapped man shows this just like Hugh's decision to get involved again. Drew's English girlfriend Mel voices this attitude of inevitability that pervades the text, claiming that neutrality and indifference towards the movements at home are feats that nobody from Northern Ireland she knows can achieve. "None of them could, not even Hugh McManus, for all his cleverness and his declared antipathy. What was it Hugh used to say? *Fuck Ulster before it fucks you*. Well it had fucked him all right. Poor Hugh" (FL 9). The solicitor's thought games, lamenting the power of demarcations and spatial boundaries, influences *Fat Lad*'s representation of Belfast and introduces a character who forcefully condemns and critiques binary thinking and the resultant spatiality. While Hugh himself is not able to overcome this particular imagery of Belfast, Drew learns to see the city's positive aspects and experiences a spatiality that does away with markers of binarisms. Already on a physical level Belfast reveals many faces, its imaginary being created by a multitude of subjective perceptions, not only in *Fat Lad*, but in all of the novels discussed in the thesis.

### **Conclusion: The Material Perspective**

The physical space of Belfast in Patterson's novels comes in many forms and shapes. Its representations range from a description of the city's labyrinthine character and its urban features in *Fat Lad* and *That Which Was* to the creation of a very localised and limited setting in *Number 5*. The larger picture painted by the texts set in the 1990s and the new millennium contrasts with the obviously fractional representation of a small suburban estate. Streets and buildings in the novels are attributed with a plethora of different meanings and uses, reflecting the multiple narratives embedded within the city. The International Hotel serves as meeting place, public house, microcosm of the city and extension of its streets all in one. Number 5, a building whose universality and interchangeability makes it into an 'Everyhouse', accommodates a plethora of narratives and likewise adapts

new meaning in each one of them. Home, safe house, prison, or medium for individual expression, there are seemingly no limits to its transmutations. The building symbolises the city's many faces, and its different functions mirror the various imaginaries the characters carry of the city as a whole. Just like The International Hotel constitutes a microcosm of the city, the neighbourhood in *Number 5* can be seen as one too, reflecting the urban complexity within a small part of it.

The city displays its flexibility, as oppositions between public and private space but also between the urban and rural landscapes are eroded. Belfast stretches into its environment and incorporates the lie of the land and the mountains within the cityscape, gaining different meaning within the narratives. But just as sometimes these boundaries between the urban and the rural are highlighted instead of merged together, sectarian boundaries are portrayed as part of the city, and the binary structure of two opposed communities pervades its spatiality. However, the immutability and essentialist origins of boundaries are highly contested within the novels, and binarisms are constantly deconstructed. *The International*, by portraying the emergence of noticeable sectarian divisions and emphasising the effort the city officials need to apply in order to maintain religiously homogeneous space, deconstructs the divisions as forced upon the city by a minority of its inhabitants and establishes them as volatile. The Loyalist feud ridicules the stubborn adherence to constructed binarisms, and the sectarian interfaces and their spatial markers, such as flags and painted streets and walls as portrayed in *That Which Was*, present themselves as only one aspect of a complex cityscape. With the help of a positively contradictory North Belfast and a receptive group of German tourists the text establishes the city as a multiplicity of interconnected places that come together to form a multifaceted and changing urbanity. In *Fat Lad* Hugh McManus's scathing repudiation of the binary structure pervading Belfast and its spatiality criticises this closed system. Furthermore, his negative image of the city riddled by spatial demarcations introduces one more city imaginary in a novel that already offers multiple narrative perspectives and subjective perceptions of Belfast.

## The Social Perspective

This multi-faceted and complex city is further displayed in the plethora of personal narratives and the intricate social network that populate Glenn Patterson's novels. While in the previous chapter I have concentrated on the material space of the city, its various functions, meanings and means to constitute a part of the city imaginary, in this chapter I focus on the subjects who define and fill this material space, who make it "humanly meaningful" (Buell 145) and give it sense. Urban Studies regard the social dimension as vital for the constitution of the city. "Hier wird davon ausgegangen, dass Raum – und damit auch die Stadt – allein in den Handlungen der Subjekte entsteht" (Altnöder 300). In her essay on the city as a body in literary representation, Sonja Altnöder cites a number of publications that engage with spatial theory, prominently amongst them Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. Summarising the common denominator of these works, she points towards the importance of social relations for the production of space: "Gemeinsam ist diesen Studien die Annahme der Stadt als soziales Gefüge bzw. als Vergesellschaftungsform, die durch die Praktiken der BewohnerInnen sowie durch die Beziehungen zwischen ihnen entsteht" (301). Glenn Patterson's Belfast is unmistakably coloured by its inhabitants, that is, the characters of his novels and their actions. They purport images of the environment they live in and through their manifold actions establish the setting, creating a complex and shifting city, one that is very much alive. In *The International* Danny embraces this important aspect of Patterson's urban imagination inside the hotel bar and exhibits great "humane compassion" (Kelly, "Historical Baggage" 28).

Opening time. How I loved those words. Like public house. Such generosity. The instant I turned the key in the lock I felt myself... expand, is the only word I can think of to describe it – forgetting for the moment that twelve hours previously I had turned the key in the opposite direction and prayed never to clap eyes on another customer so long as I lived. It was always the way. In fact, the worse the night before, the greater, perversely, was the anticipation. I liked to think of the entire building holding its breath; we might have been at the bottom of the pile, architecturally speaking, but to me *The International* was never truly itself without people in the bars.

Every opening time was a new beginning, but Saturday opening time was something else again. I thank the god who gave its name for Saturday. The people's day. [...] Saturday was a day, I always felt, when anything might happen. (TI 24-5)

The Blue Bar constitutes a microcosm of the city that is shaped by the customers, for better or worse. Danny exhibits a passionate love for the people of Belfast despite their faults and misbehaviour that he knows all too well, and he welcomes them as an inherent part of the material space, equating the building with the people who populate it, letting it expand with life. In the novel the hotel represents the city, and the narrative expands to encompass a human urbanity. Just as The International is not truly itself without people, Belfast can never be truly itself without people. The novel begins in the early hours of Saturday, ‘the people’s day’, accordingly presenting itself as the people’s narrative. Belfast’s inhabitants define the city in *The International*, and through their presence impress a feeling of endless opportunity upon Danny. The urban complex is characterised as humane and open, not only in *The International* but also in Glenn Patterson’s other novels. *Fat Lad*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* each in their own way represent the city of Belfast through the characters and their social interaction. In doing so, they emphasise both the importance of the individual for the city and the existence of a community that results from the social network the inhabitants continuously weave. Belfast is defined through the people’s presence, their deeds and their words.

### **Linguistic Markers**

Starting with the latter, the notions of language and discourse become important for the way the city is constructed. Both the mode and the content of the characters’ speech contribute to the picture of Belfast that is formed in the novels. Patterson’s texts are dotted with Northern Irish phrases and verbalisations, placing the narrative firmly within the small country. Mostly, the accent and inflections remain uncommented on within the text and simply constitute an inherent part of the characters. However, sometimes the narrators draw attention towards them in order to confirm Belfast as setting of and influence on the text. This happens, at one point or another, in all four novels.

Drew remembers the Belfast proverb which links the city environment with its rural surroundings: “*When you can’t see the Black Mountain, it means it’s raining; when you can, it means it’s going to rain*” (FL 45). In the young man the saying awakens early and deeply implanted memories of his childhood relationship with his father and of his city of birth, two things that are inextricably connected in Drew’s story. The proverb simultaneously creates a mental bridge between Drew as a child and Drew as an adult and strengthens Belfast’s continuous central position for both the novel and Drew’s life.

However, it is not the text’s first reflexive comment on the linguistic specifics disseminated within Belfast society. Already on the first pages of *Fat Lad*, Drew makes the experience of being involuntarily associated with the place he has left behind to study in England. His accent links him to the city he has fled and evokes the feeling of stagnation Belfast of the 1980s causes in him, and which he yearns to be free of.

—Goldfish? My granny had a goldfish once. It drowned.

The crack that lost him his virginity. Indirectly. A dreadful joke, if joke you could even call it, for there was no more to it than that: a drowning goldfish and a Northern Irish voice. (FL 1)

The sarcastic comment not only reveals Drew’s distinctive inflection to his fellow students, but its content also relates his family to Belfast again. The goldfish becomes the main symbol for the dead-end situation Drew associates with Belfast and his youth in the city. The symbol frequently reoccurs in the novel, and the animal can never free itself from its own limitations. Drew loathes the fish for this inability: “The bloody goldfish. [...] [I]t had turned up in his dreams the previous night and was still there when he awoke this morning, going round and round in his brain as monotonously and pointlessly as it had used to in its bowl” (FL 3). Melanie puts it even more drastically: “Some disgusting goldfish his granny used to keep, its nose and tail so close together in the bowl it was almost able to eat its own shit” (FL 10). Drew flees this overwhelming sense of stagnation, choosing voluntary exile in England. In his position as an outsider his accent is not only consciously noticed for the first time but also has a positive impact, as Kelly, a

fellow student from England, falls for his “Northern Irish voice” and becomes his first girlfriend. Drew is delighted. “Amazed too, though not for the first time since arriving in England a fortnight before, at the unexpected effects of this thing coming from his mouth, this Belfast accent, his sister’s childhood nightmare. A stigma turned distinction” (FL 1). What Drew has believed to be his mark of shame he cannot hide becomes an asset that lets him appear more interesting. In the context of this relationship Patterson plays out two antipodal images of Belfast against each other. On the one hand, there is Drew’s nightmarish image of a city, which resembles Hugh McManus’s perception of the city as being impaled by its own inability to develop, caught up in an unresolvable conflict. On the other hand, there is Kelly’s romantic generalisation of Ireland (she unquestioningly includes the North) which holds the allure of the unknown and yet familiar. The narrative’s description of her shows as much: “Her name was Kelly Thorpe, a language student from Leicester: *though my great-grandparents on my mother’s side were from Ireland, which is where I get Kelly*. At Christmas she sent him a card in Belfast, with an airmail sticker in the top left-hand corner of the envelope” (FL 2). For the girl Northern Ireland holds the allure of unknown roots in a far-away place. The opposition of Drew’s and Kelly’s images renders both representations of the city obsolete and clears the way for the text to create a new representation of Belfast. Additionally the joke serves to establish Belfast as a major influence within the narrative already on the very first page of the novel, when Drew is still in England.

In *That Which Was* the mention of an accent serves the similar purpose of asserting the setting, but it also defines the characters as a product of the city. On first encountering Larry, Avery immediately notices his inflection, establishing him as a person from his own home city. “The accent was more assertively Belfast than Avery had imagined” (TTW 10). Des, a Catholic priest and friend, is likewise attributed with an in-depth knowledge of the social conventions of the city when he meets up with Avery: “Des sat facing him. So, he said, anything strange or startling? The old Belfast opening gambit” (TWW 193). The clergyman has internalised the phrase peculiar to his home, and so establishes himself as a



knowledgeable part of the city. At the same time, however, in using the expression, he helps generate Belfast's distinctive personality. Like Patterson's other characters, Des is both a representative product and performative producer of the image of the city. The subjects in the novel constitute an integral aspect of the urban image, but they also create and shape this image of Belfast in their social conduct and conversation, as the city takes form in both content and phrasing of their speech.

*Number 5* expands Belfast's society to include newcomers and immigrants. It shows in many instances that to belong to the urban community and to become part of the city, you do not have to be born into it. In *Lapsed Protestant* Patterson states this very sentiment: "For that is the beautiful thing about a city, you don't have to qualify for citizenship: you live in it, you are of it" (133). While the parents of the Tan family still struggle with the linguistic peculiarities, the children are well assimilated. In a later chapter of the novel, Toni, a young woman from England, has made not only Number 5 but also Belfast her home, as her language clearly shows. Her new environment has changed her inflection. This becomes evident when she speaks about her ex-boyfriend – "'The fucker,' she said. She'd picked up the accent" (N5 244) – but on a deeper level "[i]t wasn't just the accent Toni had picked up, it was a whole way of thinking and talking" (N5 245). At the same time her balaclava-grams<sup>43</sup> realign the perspective on the Troubles, affecting the image of the city put forth in the novel. Just like Des, Tony constitutes both representative product and performative producer of the city after having been there only a few months, the social influence functioning in two ways. While the community affects the individual, the individual also has the possibility to leave its mark on the city and change its image. I come back to these aspects of individuality and community in social space and the ways in which they are emphasised in the novels later on in more detail.

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<sup>43</sup> This is a practical joke service where telegrams are delivered by persons in balaclavas.

### Multiple Perspectives

On the one hand dialogue and direct speech in the novels serve as a means to convey the linguistic particularities endemic to Northern Ireland and its capital city. On the other hand they constitute one kind of discourse through which Belfast is formed within the text. They shed light on the urban image propounded by the characters or on the intensity of their relationship with it. Subjective remarks establish multiple perceptions and individual perspectives on the urban for every character. In *Fat Lad* the old man sitting next to Drew on the way from the airport cannot stop talking about his familiar environment and feels the need to comment on every little detail. His enthusiasm reveals an intricate liaison with the city, while Drew, who has tried to detach himself from the city of his birth, would rather not speak about it at all, but merely listens resignedly to the man's explanations (FL 6). The young man's refusal to establish an emotional relationship with the urban space is mirrored in the silence and the careful distancing from terms that might suggest a positive engagement. A little remark made by Ellen emphasises Drew's attempt at demarcation. His sister welcomes him back with the words "Good to see you home. Home? Drew thought, but said nothing" (FL 22). While the word comes naturally over Ellen's lips, it rather irritates Drew. Once again the siblings' antipodal relationship to the city becomes apparent. Ellen, who felt so foreign and out of place as a child, being stuck in a nightmare of Northern Irish voices, is at ease in Belfast now. Drew on the other hand, who was born in the city, has become estranged from it. Sister and brother carry two very different city imaginaries within them.

Other means of communicating heterogeneous images of the city are the various forms of media that are addressed in the novels. Radio, television and newspapers support the characters' reflexions on the city they live in; they provide multiple perspectives and set the local urbanity into a national and international context. Hughes sees the development in communication media as a major influence that helps the city's inhabitants adopt a global point of view and compare and relate the city to others – a tendency that is repeatedly reflected within the novels. "[T]he development in broadcasting and electronic technologies which have given Belfast dwellers an expanded sense of themselves as not simply

living in a small marginal city but as partaking of the global experience of being urban” (Hughes “‘Town of Shadows’” 143). In Patterson’s texts the media fulfil various functions, propounding multiple, even contradictory images of Belfast. They emphasise both the city’s local uniqueness and its global connections to other urban centres. They portray it as a striving metropolis and provincial town at the same time. Medial images enrich the representation of Belfast within Patterson’s novels and establish the city as a complex structure, characterised and formed by the society that occupies it.

*The International* offers numerous perspectives of Belfast both from the inside and outside, which in the novel come together to create a multifaceted and diverse city. Peculiarly, it is the lack of any media representation that informs one of them. The Vances, an American couple on holiday in Ireland, emphasise Belfast’s near inexistence in the international media before the start of the Troubles.

The Vances were surprised by Belfast. I would go so far as to say they were tickled to find a city of any size here at all. Dublin they knew plenty about – James Joyce and Molly Malone – but Belfast...? Folks back home didn’t sing songs about it and the Vances couldn’t remember ever having seen the city in the movies. Natalie in particular kept on about how cute everything was, as though Belfast was a doll-sized version of the real thing. From what I saw those first couple of days – the little winks and smiles that passed between them, the under-the-table-nudges – she and Bob regarded the inhabitants with the same mixture of affection and amusement. Nothing is too serious in a toy town. (TI 107-8)

The Vances, putting forth an outside perspective, exclude the Northern capital from an Irish imaginary, which nourishes the idea of a rural idyll with the one exception of Dublin. Belfast cannot be on a par with its famous brother in the Republic either, because it lacks its colourful folklore and international fame. The existence of Belfast takes the Americans by surprise. They fail to acknowledge it as a proper city because of this lack of outside information, and they condescendingly look down on both the dimensions of the urban space and its inhabitants.

While for foreigners this small capital amidst a rural environment might seem peculiar, almost unreal in size and character, its inhabitants exhibit an inside perspective on Belfast, and more often than not the city is the only reality they

know. Mostly they fail to see the city within a national or global context. Danny, for example, does not give the town much thought at all, exposing his limited perspective: "If I had seen other cities I would have understood that Belfast was in its way beautiful, as it was I reckoned there were probably better places to live and probably places a whole lot worse" (TI 61). Yet *The International* provides a number of instances where the global viewpoint is incorporated into the local narrative. One punter introduces a political topic of international scope to the Saturday night at the Blue Bar, by switching the television to the news bulletin:

A guy on the screen held up a teacup and said something I couldn't hear; subtitles appeared in what I thought might be Irish. A chorus of voices howled for the return of BBC. The wag stepped back on to the chair, his hand hovering over the tuner.

"Are you sure, now?"

The chorus was sure: "Turn the fucking thing over!"

"Have it your own way," he said. "But we'll all have to learn to speak it one of these days."

As Belfast bar banter went, this struck me as being a bit close to the bone, though nobody else seemed in the least put out. Only much later, chancing to read down the weekend listings, did I realise that the language I had seen on the television was Russian.

Like I said, sometimes I was a total wanker. (TI 54)

Danny's initial assumption, the immediate reaction of the other guests and the punter's remark describe the clash of narrow and broad perspectives. Danny, who has never been outside Belfast, watches the programme from a local point of view and immediately relates its contents to the growing political tensions in Northern Ireland, while the majority of the guests simply do not exhibit any interest in the news but prefer the sports programme. This too shows their spatially limited world view. Events that happen in other places of the world do not seem to interest them particularly, while they focus on the developments on their own doorstep. The man responsible for the change in programme introduces the global perspective by showing an awareness of what is going on in the world. Additionally, he advances the conviction that global events will not leave local life untouched, merging the local with the global.

Ted Connolly, a fallen football star returned to his hometown, constitutes another minor character to introduce a more global and relational outlook that contrasts with the tendency to perceive Belfast in isolation. He puts forth a

negative opinion of the Northern Irish capital, which loses out when compared to cities in England:

“Take last summer. England has the World Cup. London’s like... what am I saying, London? Even *Sunderland* – there’s all these people, Chileans, Italians, *Koreans*, for God’s sake – we were dropping fucking bombs on them when I was at school – and they’re in and out of the bars, drinking with the locals, singing, swapping scarves. And what are they up to in bloody Belfast?”

Extinguishing streetlamps on the corner of Malvern Street and Arial Street. Waiting in the self-inflicted darkness on four guys strayed into a bar on the ‘wrong’ side of town.

[...] “It’s a joke,” he mumbled. “We’re a joke.” (TI 252-3)

In harshly admonishing his hometown for closing itself off to global influences, Ted Connolly advocates an opening up towards outside and global perspectives, but he meets only little to no open support within the Blue Bar. Most characters concentrate on local developments and propound an image of the city that evolves from an inside perspective.

Stanley’s creative imagination also centres on the social complex of Belfast. However, he learns to broaden his horizon and to reflect ironically on this limited viewpoint, eventually presenting a more complex picture of the city in his puppetry act. To begin with, his perception of Belfast mirrors the at times contradictory self-awareness of its inhabitants. On the one hand, the city constitutes the capital of Northern Ireland, its political and administrative centre. On the other hand, the smallness of both the country and the city impresses itself on its people on a regular basis. Additionally Belfast fulfils the role of the outsider in two ways, as the Vance’s stance towards it shows. Belonging to the United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland, the place is physically detached from the rest of the state by the Irish Sea. Geographically it forms an entity with the Republic of Ireland, but history has divided the two. Consequently Stanley’s puppets focus very much on local traditions and act on a small-scale level. “Stanley invented addresses for them two doors apart off North Queen Street” (TI 190). He gives them a Belfast accent and adorns them with the typical working-class flat cap. At the same time the creator of “*RAB and JEM, Belfast’s BIGGEST little comics*” (TI 191) cannot but hope for a development that leads him beyond

the city boundaries, and he dreams of a national audience. “From the very start he set his sights on television’s mass audience” (TI 189), ignoring the fact that not only Rab’s and Jem’s appearances, but also their topics focus too much on events and developments of locally restricted importance. “He had one routine about ecumenics. He had one about the B.U.M. [Belfast Urban Motorway] for which he made extra puppets: Rab with a white moustache, Jem with a walking stick, still waiting” (TI 193). While for Stanley these routines evolve around subjects of great importance that would be well received by a regional and even national mass audience, others disagree with him, and inside and outside images of Belfast clash jarringly. Larry Bowen, a British children’s television presenter, introduces a perspective that establishes Rab and Jem firmly as a local phenomenon that is not congruent with the way how Belfast and Northern Ireland are perceived from an outside point of view.

“Your act is very, ah... Well, they’re *Belfast* puppets.”

Stanley took a drink so as not to say anything too rash.

“But I thought I explained that to you.”

Now Larry Bowen really did laugh.

“Oh, yes, you said. At least, I knew they were Irish. It’s just I was expecting... oh, you know.”

“No,” said Stanley, too miserable to make this any easier. “I don’t.”

“Green suits – the little read beards?”

“Leprechauns?”

“Yes,” said Larry. “Sort of.” Then hopefully: “Leprechauns are instantly recognisable.”

Stanley let his gaze rove around the Blue Bar where very un-leprechaun-like Belfast men drank and chatted and smoked cigarettes. (TI 204-05)

With the help of Rab and Jem, *The International* establishes two oppositional perspectives of the city, emphasising heterogeneous perceptions of urbanity. Not one prevalent version of Belfast exists, but many different ones jostle for attention. The various urban imaginations come together to form the indefinable diversity that characterises Patterson’s representation of Belfast. After an initial shock on receiving an outsider’s perspective on his home, Stanley adds another layer of complexity by combining inside and outside viewpoints and exposing them both as constructed and subjective:

Rab and Jem would disguise themselves as leprechauns to try and get work in England. They would be useless of course, terrible accents, beards coming unstuck. The worse they were the funnier it would be, a complete send-up of all the stereotypes, ending perhaps – yes, why not? – with their own. I mean, who wore a flat cap these days in Belfast? (TI 206)

Stanley refuses to accept the limitations of his puppets and uses them to fight against a restrictive singularity of images. He criticizes an outside viewpoint but also begins to consciously reflect on the inside image and questions the right of one of the two to dominate the other.

Conflicting images are also disseminated by the media within Belfast. Its mere presence is translated by Belfast's inhabitants into an antipodal image of the city as localized and urbane at the same time. On the one hand *The International* sets up the social network of Belfast as a tightly-knit community, in which the village grapevine still distributes information most effectively, even too effectively at times. Danny's cousin Clive complains about it: "God, you can't scratch yourself in this town but somebody knows it" (TI 267). On the other hand the people heavily rely on more official sources of information and attribute great credibility to the written word: "And Liam said the words that clinched most arguments in the Blue Bar: 'It was in the paper'" (TI 259). The newspaper is supplemented by animated pictures: "Northern Ireland had its own commercial station [...], Ulster Television, or Channel 9 as people called it. No home was complete without its box" (TI 183). The increasing influence of television also goes both ways. The existence of a local station and its growing popularity shows Northern Ireland's autonomy and self-awareness as a distinctive region. As the major city in Northern Ireland and the place where the station is based, Belfast is attributed with an importance befitting of great urban centres. However, the inhabitants also exhibit a sceptical stance towards local media, rating the national station much higher in credibility and up-to-dateness. The arrival of Ulster Television at a fire that has erupted in the city centre prompts a sarcastic remark by the onlookers: "'UTV's arrived.' 'That's quick for them,' I said, and the woman next to me said, 'Maybe they heard it on the BBC'" (TI 14). By belittling the city's achievement of launching its own television station, the people emphasise the small-town character of Belfast. The appearance of the media in

*The International* shows two diverging versions of the Northern Irish capital, elevating it to an urban centre of national importance and establishing it as a small town with a tightly-knit community that is characterised by personal contact and communication at the same time.

30 years on, the media depicted in *That Which Was*, their importance having grown significantly in the meantime, still introduces multiple pictures of Belfast. Repeatedly resorting to media descriptions of the city in order to characterise it, the novel's narrative starts with a paragraph on a local free paper:

The *East Belfast Community News* (verified free delivery to 31,094 households) is, by definition, a paper that recognizes its own limits. This is not to say that the paper wants for hard news. Alongside the pictures of councillors squeezed into chicken suits for charity, of local comedians holding basketballs above the reach of leaping schoolchildren; alongside the ads for carpet clearouts, for genuine reductions in genuine pine and genuine leather, and stories of disrepair and disputed access, which – beyond 31,094 households – most people would consider free too high a price to pay to read about, there are, week in, week out, reports of the sort of violence familiar to anyone who has lived in what once could fairly have been called the industrial inner city and of the sort peculiar to a place where, for three decades, everything from an ideological difference through an upsurge in car theft to plain looking at someone funny has been regarded as a cause for paramilitary intervention. (TWW 3)

Mixing the trite with the serious, this short description of the paper's content manages to capture the essence of the city as a jumble of micronarratives, all of which, no matter how trivial, are equally important and worthy of reporting. Significantly, this conglomeration of stories only covers a small part of the city, and, "recognizing its own limits," does not attempt to encompass the entire urban environment. In this paragraph Belfast is assembled as a collection of unique narratives that can never be complete and which constantly change. Just as the *East Belfast Community News* reports on and creates new stories every week, so does the city that constantly transforms and develops. Even years after the beginning of the peace process paramilitary activity affects the image of Belfast perceptibly. However, this aspect cannot dominate over other urban facets and must exist alongside the leaping schoolchildren and carpet clearouts. Furthermore, the power wielded by paramilitary groups is put in perspective through an ironic



comment. In ridiculing the groups' obsession for absolute control, the text deprives them of their seriousness.

The *East Belfast Community News* is supplemented by a radio phone-in programme. This medium creates a stream of information that flows in two directions and enables a democratic discourse in which many can participate at the same time. Here the focus on social interaction between the inhabitants and its performative power become apparent. The topic of the show revolves around Ken Avery, and despite the radio presenter's insisting pleas to move on, the participants cannot be distracted from this topic. "For the next hour and a quarter every second caller wanted to address the subject of the Reverend Ken Avery. The presenter lamented, as he was often moved to do. Folks, there are wars on out there. There are natural disasters, matters of great po-li-ti-cal moment. Is this really what you want to be talking about?" (TWW 4) Just as the *East Belfast Community News* emphasises the self-centredness of the urban society in both name and content, the topics being restricted to events of the part of town it is produced for, the participants of the radio programme exhibit an interest in local news and discussion. National or international news and developments pale next to more immediate dealings. The people express their sense of belonging and affiliation through the content of the discussions in which they engage and accordingly define East Belfast as a complex entity that bundles a number of micronarratives. At the same time they also display a viewpoint which focuses on the city itself and elides a broader perspective. The readers of the *East Belfast Community News* and listeners to the radio phone-in show remain very much rooted in their known urban environment.

This, however, constitutes only one aspect of the image of the city that is put forth in *That Which Was*. Global developments do not leave Belfast and its inhabitants unaffected. Visits of Bill Clinton and the Dalai Lama show that the city represented in the novel strives to become part of a global network of political and cultural exchange, while at the same time trying to uphold a local identity. The lecture the Dalai Lama gives in the Ulster Hall is "preceded by a celebration

of Northern Ireland's cultural diversity" (TWW 116),<sup>44</sup> putting local heritage into dialogue with the religious leader's global perspective.

The former even makes it into the *East Belfast Community News*, which, on this occasion, encompasses the global in the local, deconstructing the opposition between the two terms:

Thursday, the East Belfast Community News appeared. Avery was on page three, looking just a little cross in the crowd gathered round the Dalai Lama. The caption explained that the picture had been taken at the Springfield Road peace line, but the main story, immediately to the right focused on protests, staged elsewhere in the city on the day of the visit, by fundamentalist Protestant clerics.

It was anyone's guess what meaning the casual reader would have assembled from this smorgasboard of image and words. Avery looked to have a foot – a face – in both camps. (TWW 133)

The international influence personified by the Dalai Lama meets Belfast space and history in the form of the Springfield Road peace line. A local perspective is added in the narrative of the fundamentalist clergy. The *East Belfast Community News* provides a platform of multiple viewpoints which coexist next to each other and assemble to represent city life.

Similarly Clinton's farewell tour to Belfast provides an opportunity to combine global influence and local life. His appearance at the Odyssey, the newly built arena, is taken as an opportunity to boast of Belfast as a modern and trendy metropolis. While the American ex-president first became involved with Northern Ireland in order to conciliate in the conflict, he now returns to be presented with a completely different aspect of Belfast – a city of sports and fun, which uses the occasion to proudly present its newly founded ice hockey team. The media too incorporate the global celebrity into local city life. However, despite the fact that radio and newspapers "were full of Bill Clinton" (TWW 247), other stories are narrated to put the event in perspective and maintain a multi-faceted and democratic image of the city. "Clinton dominated the first ten minutes. Itinerary, security, impact on the political process. Then it was a problem with a locked

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<sup>44</sup> The remark following the quotation, however, adds an ironic connotation to the event and suggests that the city officials, who organised the programme, aim to recreate rather than uphold the country's identity, and that the audience is well aware of this fact: "The woman in front of Avery leant in and said something to her neighbour, who smirked, nodding" (TWW 116). Nevertheless, the intention to combine the local with the global remains obvious.

disabled toilet in the flagship Belfast department store, a detour through the state of city-centre toilets generally, then it was the walkout” (TWW 247). The thematic gap between a state visit and the situation of public sanitary facilities shrinks to insignificance as the radio presents a jumble of micronarratives.

In *Number 5* András Hideg deconstructs the binarism of global and local, merging the opposing terms. He continuously relates the politically motivated actions in Northern Ireland to international events, trying to put them in perspective with each other, and inadvertently irritating his neighbour, Rodney, during their many discussions: “Someone was saying disintegration, someone else reunification. I heard independence, capitulation, direct rule. I heard Hideg say, in his Hideg way, ‘Yes, but let us have some perspective, we are not talking about Bangladesh’” (N5 94). “It was not Cyprus, he said, not the Lebanon” (N5 139). With his remarks the Hungarian immigrant introduces an outside view to a localized discussion and places the city of Belfast in a global context. He counteracts the self-centredness of some of the other characters and shifts the focal point towards other places in the world, advocating a postmodern simultaneity. In addition, András Hideg can be regarded as a personified amalgamation of two opposing perspectives. Having married a local girl, and having lived in the same Belfast suburb for almost two decades, he has become a part of the community and has acquired an inside knowledge of Belfast. At the same time, however, he still remains an outsider in his long-time home. Tan’s comment on Hideg’s accent expresses this paradox nicely: “His English made me think of the way a rubber glove sometimes felt on your hand, almost too good a fit” (TI 140). In the boy’s eyes the man has overshot the mark and become too perfect in his attempt to fit himself seamlessly into the community. Ironically, Rodney holds a completely different opinion of the Hungarian’s language skills. According to him, Hideg has never tried hard enough to become a full member of the neighbourhood, but has always held on to his foreignness with pride: “Seventeen years he had been living in this country. I went to correct him, but his gaze was wandering again. Fine, let him talk like a foreigner all his life” (98). Hideg, a man who retains both an outsider’s and insider’s role throughout the narrative and combines two opposing terms within

him, refuses to be categorized by either the other characters or the reader, enriching the narrative of *Number 5* and introducing an element of multiplicity. Even after his death, his funeral causes confusion and creates an opportunity to reflect on the limitedness of local politics, when seen in isolation. Patricia follows the funeral on TV:

The coffin emerged fully, draped in a tricoloured flag, and the news reporter began to speak, his voice lost under Patricia's.

"Is that...?"

"Hungary," I said.

"Oh." (N5 189).

Looking at the event from the perspective of somebody who has grown up in Belfast, Patricia, for a moment, mistakes the flag for an Irish one, and is stumped by its Republican connotations – or at least this is what her question seems to indicate. Hideg, until the very end, demands an alternative perspective, one that requires a global focus.

But he is not the only character in *Number 5* to introduce a global perspective in a localized narrative. Rodney, who exhibits an ambivalent stance towards Hideg's continuous comparisons of Belfast with the rest of the globe, secretly creates his very own world by decorating one of the rooms in his house with a map of the world. As he adds to the painting and adjusts it over the course of seven years, Rodney introduces the global into one of the most localized and enclosed spaces possible: his own house and his own room. What is more, he does so in a very localized fashion. In a city that has become famous for its murals, Rodney paints the world onto his wall. Adding to "The World by Rodney McGovern" (N5 116) becomes a much-loved pastime for him and, despite the fact that he regularly resents Hideg's remarks, provides Rodney with a global perspective of his very own.

Before moving out of the house the painter hides his work of art under wallpaper, but it is unearthed again more than two decades later by a fresh generation of home-owners. Tony and Mel preserve the painting and use Rodney's map as a wall of reference for their own view of the world. While Rodney literally hid his interest in the world, in the new millennium a global

outlook has become almost inevitable, and the local and the global invariably meet more frequently. Patterson illustrates this development by including a number of references in Mel's and also Catriona's story, ranging from food to transport.<sup>45</sup>

In Glenn Patterson's novels Belfast inhabitants create various images of their city that entail both local and global viewpoints and include multiple topics and foci. This jumble of micronarratives, shaped and perpetuated by social interaction, makes up a heterogeneous and humane cityscape.

### **Relationships and Narratives**

On a social level not only the city perceptions purported by individual characters and social organs such as newspapers contribute to the image of the city, but also the conglomeration of and interaction between the subjects themselves. To a large part urban *society* forms the Belfast in Glenn Patterson's novels. Without its people, material space remains an empty shell. The heterogeneous mass of inhabitants and their stories play a central role within all novels. They feature both as individual subjects and a community and come together to fill the urban setting with life. Thus, space becomes an event and is defined by a web of social interconnections and a network of narratives. "In seiner Diskursivität konstituiert sich der Stadtkörper also durch die über die Körper realisierten Praktiken seiner BewohnerInnen sowie durch deren Positionierungen und Beziehungen untereinander" (Altnöder 303). Altnöder, combining the social production of space with the theory of space as a body, goes on to point towards the multifacetedness and continuous transformation that results in this presupposition: "Ebenso wie der Körper kann die Stadt als ein Prozess gelten, in dem sowohl diskursive Urbanität wie auch Materialität immer wieder aufs Neue ausgehandelt werden und dabei lediglich eine Illusion von Stabilität erzeugen können" (303). The sociality that defines the city turns the urban complex into a constantly shifting environment that exchanges stability for mutability.

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<sup>45</sup> Again, I expound further on these references when taking a closer look at the temporal dimension and dealing with the changes the Northern Irish society undergoes within Patterson's narratives.

A colourful variety of Belfast inhabitants and their diversified narratives inform the urban image of *That Which Was*. The clergyman Avery is ideally placed to meet a great number of people, coming from different strata of society and stations in life. He speaks to fathers and daughters, young parents and old widows. His daily duties take him to them to talk about their worries and loved ones, emphasising the complex social network that encompasses each and every person and that connects them to each other. *That Which Was* constitutes the city largely through the network of the congregation and situates Avery centrally within it in order to establish the manifold relations. As a minister, Avery acts as a 'Seelsorger', a carer of souls for his congregation, whose members are portrayed as a number of individuals who are linked just as much by their place of residence as their religious belief. Some might be very actively religious; others feel they belong to their church and congregation because it is part of their neighbourhood. Avery offers spiritual assistance to them all: to those who attend his service every week, but also to the ones he does not even recognize at first glance, the ones who only come to church for special occasions. A young couple has its new-born son baptized by the minister, but he never sees them again, until the day he visits the father in hospital, who has been beaten up by members of a paramilitary organization (TWW 96). The family's story is only one of many narratives plaited into the main plot. Ken Avery celebrates weddings and commiserates with the groom when one is cancelled (TWW 17). He visits Mr Booth, whose daughter fears for his death (TWW 89), and joins the Old Wives' Fellowship for coffee (TWW 141). In *That Which Was* Patterson pays tribute to the life stories of Belfast citizens. With Avery he has created a character who exhibits deep respect and compassion for the inhabitants of the city and their stories. Focusing on a local congregation in East Belfast, the text encompasses the notion of both community and individualism, linking the multitude of personal stories with each other and the narrative of Ken Avery while at the same time retaining their uniqueness. One example of the passion for the Northern Irish people expressed in *That Which Was*, and the way in which they are portrayed both in context and as individual lives, constitutes the mention of a publication special to Avery.

A book had been published the previous year, a chronology, with details of all the people killed in the thirty-three years since 1966. It was a work of great integrity and restraint, entirely without sensationalism or sentimentality, a labour of the author's true love for their fellow Northern Irish men and women. It was also one of the fastest-selling books in Belfast's history. Rumour had it that in certain parts of the city centre there were people who would steal you a copy to order, guaranteed delivery fifteen minutes maximum. (TWW 56)

Such a book was actually published in 1999, a year before *That Which Was* is set: *Lost Lives. The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*. In the appraisal of the fictitious version the narrator of Patterson's text takes his hat off to the author's democratic and civic-minded sentiment, a gesture that mirrors Avery's feelings, further ascertaining his love for his fellow women and men. The book aims at completeness, claiming to mention every single death in connection to the Troubles, assembling them in chronological order and thus illustrating the immense cost of the fighting to the entire Northern Irish community. While the novel acknowledges this historiographical feat, the individual narrative is immediately emphasized again, first as Avery looks up his former girlfriend Johanna, and later when an elderly man witnesses the effect the book has on him.

The old boy across the way was studying him again over the rims of his glasses. Everything all right? he asked. On the table in front of him, the NME was open at the charts pages.

I'm fine, said Avery. Just a little...

The old boy nodded. I know, he said. My son's in there. October the fifteenth 1974.

I'm very sorry, said Avery. For some reason he was unable to take his eyes off the sky-blue windcheater.

Long time ago now, the old boy said. There was not a trace of bitterness or self-pity in the voice. (TWW 59)

Individual and communal narratives cross each other again and again not only in *That Which Was* but also Patterson's other novels. Sometimes they complement each other; sometimes they contradict each other, so it comes as no surprise that the term *community* constitutes a troublesome concept for the author. He calls it "a much abused term in Northern Ireland" (*Lapsed Protestant* 42), referring to the ways it has continuously been utilised by paramilitary organisations and politicians who have limited society to two main religious groups.

*That Which Was* portrays Belfast society as a splintered landscape of a multitude of bigger and smaller communities that are never exclusively defined by religion. Attempts to unify these groupings into recognizable communities are rarely successful. “The *East Belfast Community News* (verified free delivery to 31,094 households) is, by definition, a paper that recognizes its own limits. [...] It is no news then, though it takes up column after column, that east Belfast does not imagine itself a single, harmonious community” (TWW 3).

The identities of Patterson’s characters are shaped by a myriad of experiences, and their social network of relationships is never formed solely by religious affiliations. All of the texts emphasise the uniqueness of every single life, establishing Belfast as a heterogeneous place, where the individual and the community do not rule each other out. “[C]ities provide community whilst also offering a more unfettered environment where individualism can flourish” (Boal and Royle, “Enduring City” 4). Avery, who fights hard to keep his congregation alive and together, is the first to acknowledge this fact:

On Thursday lunchtime he attended a lecture of the City Mission: Facing Up to the Fractions. More than 9/10 of the people on the globe would soon be living in urban areas. More than 9/10 of the world’s current city dwellers attended no manner of religious service. The question was, was the Church driving people away by the slow pace of change, or were the changes too fast, making the Church just another form of entertainment that today’s urban population could take or – as it increasingly appeared – leave? (17)

By accepting the people’s changing priorities and views on life, Avery acknowledges the need to pursue individuality, while at the same time trying to uphold a sense of community as asserted by his church. He acts as a mouthpiece for a variety of voices, and he relates them to each other in his function as minister. Thus a new relationship between community and individuality is formed. Not only *That Which Was*, but all of Patterson’s novels give “simultaneous expression to a variety of voices, and competing ideologies, and, thereby, [...] undermine the language of hegemonic, or ‘centralising’ groups and forces” (Peach 3). They create a democratic and cacophonous network to constitute the social essence of the city that revels in multiplicity.



Turning to *The International*, one can see parallels between Danny and Avery. Like the minister, the young barman meets people from all walks of life. Helped by the alcohol and the pretence of intimacy it evokes, Danny gets to hear their stories and worries. But while in *That Which Was* the city's heterogeneous society is presented in personal conversations with Avery, in *The International* the people come together in the Blue Bar in a multivoiced and unruly cross-section of the city's inhabitants, intensifying the impression of a jumble of stories when raising their "harsh importuning Belfast voices" (TI 125).

Moreover, Danny underlines the complexity and multifacetedness of the city with his idiosyncratic style of narration. "The narrative strategies which he employs are designed to resist single meaning, simple linear progression and authoritarian narrative control. Rather, they express plurality, multiplicity and fluidity" (Kennedy-Andrews, *(De)-Constructing the North* 110). In *The International* Glenn Patterson incorporates a multitude of stories set during or, more precisely, very shortly before a time that is officially remembered because of one event only: the first meeting of the Civil Rights Association that led to a protest movement, mobilising large parts of Northern Irish Catholics, which in turn triggered the latest and most violent stretch of religious conflict in the small country. The historically important event, however, only features as the subject of a short remark in *The International*, while a seemingly unimportant and peripheral set of narratives takes centre stage.

The storylines in *The International* permanently cross each other temporally and spatially, the homodiegetic narrator Danny taking many liberties in recounting them. His unreliability strongly contributes to the fact that no grand narratives can take hold of the text; even its very narration resists unity and credibility. Throughout the novel the reader can never be certain if and how precisely an incident happens, and Danny happily enforces this impression with remarks about his own uncertainty about the events. His unreliable narration cannot be pinned down, as he frequently and deliberately leaves the reader in doubt about the truthfulness of his information. More than once he only gets to know the stories from his colleagues. New disclosures are often preceded by sentences such as these: "I owe it to Barney, who got it from Marian, who was

just then coming off duty, the story of what happened next” (TI 117). “It was shortly after this that Barney, his shift finished, stopped in at the Blue Bar to fill me in on all that I had been missing upstairs” (TI 126). “When we met at the till a minute or two later, Jamesie told me the whole story” (TI 129). “Flea Johnston swore blind that Jamesie really did do what he told me he did next” (TI 211). Danny also freely admits that details might have gone amiss or changed coming down the information chain, that certain incidents might have been misinterpreted, or that he himself has changed the stories for his own purposes. He collects bits and pieces of information and forms a coherent story out of them. “I can speak with confidence only about those things my workmates witnessed – actions without accurate times, words without context – and what I have been able to reconstruct from later events. But I will take my own liberties in the telling” (TI 169). These liberties include changing the sequence of events and arranging them for dramatic effect. Danny wants to tell a good story, and for him it does not need to be a hundred per cent correct to be good. Small adjustments, in his view, can easily be justified with the effect they cause, and their improvement of the overall structure of the text he is creating: “If this were a film, if I were the director, I would cut from Jamesie’s duck to a cork popping in the dining room upstairs and not care that the two were not strictly speaking simultaneous” (TI 168-9). In the same way Danny, as the narrator, introduces information about characters he gained only at a much later stage, whenever he needs to get a point across. Danny exploits the authority of his narrative position to the full, introducing a level of metafiction from which he comments on his own story, thus revealing its constructedness. He fulfils the double function of being both character within and narrator at the same time. In Danny’s story, tiny gestures or short moments of eye contact form into elaborate emotional confessions:

Her mouth was a twisted pucker. Well, Danny Boy, it seemed to say, who’d’ve thought it?

I gave her a look of my own: *like you’re one to talk*.

[...] Between the two of us we managed to wrestle into submission some fairly major moral, ethical and – let’s not kid ourselves – aesthetic objections and all without another word being spoken. (TI 113)

Danny puts words into people's mouths they have not actually spoken, thus acknowledging endless possibilities rather than aiming for a faithful representation of events or characters. He freely admits to not being able to describing other people without bias and without neglecting certain aspects of them. While this troubles him at times, he does not present a solution to it, accepting the impossibility to represent the city in its completeness.

I know I said I'd take liberties telling this story, but maybe that's taking one liberty too many. Fitz was no killer, neither was my second cousin. I worry about some of the thoughts I have been putting into Clive's head, worry that the picture I am drawing is too partial. There had to be more to him than wheeling and dealing and women and ego. (TI 263)

Danny goes even so far as to doubt his description of his own personality, highlighting the subjectivity and volatility of his narration once again. "[P]erhaps we are not the most reliable judges of ourselves. I would be tempted to use a work like 'open', but I know what Jamesie would have said: *Wee lad, you're a wanker*. Would have said? Did say, time without number" (TI 28). The city can neither be represented objectively nor as a whole but must remain a jumble of voices and opinions. Danny does not simply tell the stories, but, by mixing them, tying them up with each other and prodding them to fit his narrative construct, creates the interconnected assemblage of narratives that characterises the novel, and indeed also the Blue Bar of The International Hotel. The central meeting place can only form a lifeless shell without its guests and their diverse stories, which Danny so eagerly soaks up, revelling in their heterogeneity and simultaneity: "[T]here were, as ever, a hundred and one other things going on" (TI 117). Even if he wanted to, it would hardly be possible for Danny to tell all those other things one at a time or to extricate them from each other, for they possess neither a chronological order nor a hierarchical order of importance. Danny, in any case, attempts no such thing. All he does is collect the narratives at the central place of the Blue Bar, where, at one point or another, all these stories happen, thus highlighting one more way in which they are spatially related. "The success of Danny's character and the suffusion of his first person narrative into the lives and depictions of the other main characters attests ultimately to Patterson's own increasingly self-

assured gift for granting a justice to people and their stories” (Kelly, “Historical Baggage” 28). In the Blue Bar the Vances play their secret games, Jamesie complains about the nurses’ resistance to his charm, Liam talks politics, Oscar has his fun with other guests, and Ted Connolly negotiates the conditions of his commercial. Nancy returns there, reminiscing of days long past, when The International was still called The Union and the Blue Bar belonged to an adjacent warehouse (TI 74). Clive head-butts its counter in frustration because his business deal remains unsuccessful. Barney and Marian come to the Blue Bar for after-work drinks. And here Danny meets Stanley and brings Ingrid, the two people he falls in love with that day. These characters all bring their stories with them, and Danny tells them in the course of the novel and so creates the “pluralistic postmodern humanism” (Kennedy-Andrews, “The New Humanism” 18) of the novel. He moves from one figure to the next, divulging details of each of their lives, painting a picture of a heterogeneous crowd. Danny, obviously, is especially preoccupied with Stanley and Ingrid, whose narratives he constructs bit by bit out of pieces of information he attains. In the examples of these two stories the novel’s technique of assemblage that highlights the interconnectedness and simultaneity of the narratives becomes clearest. Danny does not tell Ingrid’s and Stanley’s tales chronologically and in one piece but returns to them again and again, adding more information, not when he receives it but when he sees fit to release it in order to stress a point. Jumping back and forth in time and space, he pieces their lives together from interconnecting fragments, making it clear that their stories cannot be viewed in isolation. Danny carries his emphasis on the relatedness of narratives so far that he now and again even runs the risk of losing the individual stories and by extension also himself in this network of interconnectedness. But again, rather than working against this, the narrator regards these instances as a possibility of redefinition, revelling in the network and choosing to hide negative events in the chaos of multiple stories converging:

A busy bar is a place of noise, of individual voices all saying something vital all at once and all lost in the common clamour. I took comfort in the thought that what had passed between Jamesie and me had amounted to no more than a brief localised addition to the volume, a pulse of sound that drifted with the smoke

towards the ceiling and there was diffused until not a coherent syllable of it remained. (TI 258)

The young barman uses the social gathering in the bar and the ensuing cacophony to neglect his own narrative in favour of the manifold others. In this instance the urban society reveals its potential to dissolve individual stories in its intricate structure. Although made of multiple stories, the urban environment does not always preserve these in their entirety but rather integrates them into its complex, rendering the brief argument between Jamesie and Danny inconsequential within the babble of talk. In this scene the text does not discredit the importance of each narrative, but acknowledges the impossibility of giving credit to them all, implying that despite its wealth of narratives many more remain untold in *The International*. On another level this narrative unreliability relates to the idea of writing history by omission. It suggests that the story of Belfast, both within the fictitious environment of the novel or outside of it, can never be told objectively or unmitigated. Instead it is always subject to individual perception and ideological purposes. This rings especially true for a city in which two ideologies compete for dominance, a struggle that Patterson strives to deconstruct consistently in all of his novels.

30 pages later the text re-focuses on the individual amongst the masses, as Danny notes the unmistakable traces of every presence in the Blue Bar: “Pint glasses with handles, pint glasses without, half-pint glasses ditto, wine glasses, shorts’ glasses, highball glasses, dimpled glasses and plain. Each bore the prints of the fingers, thumbs and palms that had held them. I felt an almost parental affection, equal parts of love and loss” (TI 286). Glasses in different sizes and shapes, each one marked by its former user: Danny does not feel love for the glasses, but for the people who have held them shortly before and who, like the glasses, retain their individual personae. The fingerprints that are still visible to attest to this act as both *pars pro toto* and well-known and secure means of unequivocal identification. *The International* portrays the urban society as a multivocal and multifaceted body in which the individual subject and its narrative can momentarily submerge but cannot be lost completely, because they leave

unmistakable traces. The people of Belfast come together, to merge into an urban complex without giving up their individuality. What Eve Patten notes for Glenn Patterson's debut *Burning Your Own* holds true for *The International* as well: "Patterson displays [...] a particular brand of duality, an instinct for individualism or dissent which is balanced by sympathy for the defensive strategies and contrived political solidarity of the wider community" ("Fiction in Conflict" 141).

By employing the techniques of highly unstable narration and narrative fragmentation, Patterson forms a textual collage in *The International* that puts emphasis on a simultaneity of events, an interrelatedness of micronarratives and the seemingly infinite pool of stories that can never all be included within the text. The narrative techniques highlight the social dimension of the city representation. They stress the democratic network of relationships and constitute social interaction as a vital part of Belfast. As all stories are represented as deserving equal importance no ideologies can prevail.

The understated but resolute humanity of the novel's piecing together of such a various assemblage of marginal, lost or scandalous stories and intrigues intersecting on a single day in the hotel indicates that Belfast is not reducible to the dominant ideological conceptions of it. Like any city, Belfast's casual, unshakable plurality of quotidian human activity exhausts any such limitational attempt to define it. (Kelly, "Historical Baggage" 28)

Another method of interconnecting stories underlines Patterson's preoccupation with human experience and individual destinies in *Number 5*. Although the five stories each focus on one family, narrated by a homodiegetic narrator, some characters reappear throughout the novel and serve as links between the chapters. There is András Hideg, the Hungarian immigrant, whose lead Stella follows when she dares to sit in the sun in her own front garden. Hideg's unconventional political views constitute the final straw for Rodney and Margaret McGovern to move out of Number 5 again, and they continue to puzzle the young Tan when the two encounter each other on High Street. Even the Eliots meet András Hideg in a way, when they witness his coffin being transferred from his house to the cemetery after he has been murdered.

O'Neill and his timberyard promise to become Stella's sanctuary from her life of boredom for a while. Later on the man loses his livelihood when the company building is burned down. After his death Catriona holds a job where Stella was not allowed to have one and works at the timberyard, which after the fire has been converted into the community arts centre according to O'Neill's last wishes.

Penny Fallon frames the full time span from the 1950s into the twenty-first century. One of the first babies to be born in the estate, she leaves Number 5 in the first chapter as a small girl, emigrating to Australia with Stella and Harry. In the final chapter, when Tony and Mel have moved their "two-car, no-vacuum household" (N5 253) into Number 5, she is back, searching for the places where she has spent her early childhood. Penny brings *Number 5* full circle: with her presence she connects the beginning and the end to the chapters in between, highlighting once more the relatedness of the whole narrative.

Finally there is Ivy Moore, the biggest constant in a novel that continuously and surreptitiously underscores the changes Belfast's urban environment and its society undergo throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Ivy turns up in every chapter of the book, bringing her soon-to-be-familiar drum of salt, wishing every family good luck as it moves into the house. She gets to know them all, watching their lives from across the road, whether she wants to or not. "When houses are as close together as ours it's an effort a lot of the time not to look, a heartache now and then what you do, without meaning to, see" (N5 304). Compassionate and with affection for everyone, sometimes prying and yet curiously discreet and unobtrusive, Ivy Moore epitomizes the democratic love for the people and emphatic narrative that characterizes the novel. Thus it seems fitting for her to have the last say in *Number 5* and to finally lead the reader outside the microcosm of its environment, leaving the domestic drama and small-scale tragedies that Ivy has been engrossed in all her life behind for a moment, to make yet another connection – a connection to the countless other microcosms the world offers. "I [...] stand on my tiptoes, head now clear above the sill, looking out on to the top storeys of the houses behind and the chimneys of the houses behind them, the sky beyond them all, salmon-streaked, blue fading into black"

(N5 308). The house with the number five, its neighbourhood and above all the people living there form both the backdrop against which the five family narratives unfold and also constitute the bonds with which the narratives are tied to each other.

Although each story forms an independent narrative, and each is told from a unique narrative perspective, they remain interconnected on various levels. Materially they share the same house and area. Socially they come out of the same community. This becomes clear in the reappearance of a number of minor characters. Hideg, McNeal and Ivy and others serve as links between the five stories. Firstly, through their presence a network of social connections is established within each narrative. Secondly, this network pervades the whole novel, developing within the time frame of fifty years. Like the materiality of the neighbourhood, its community undergoes essential changes. On an individual level people leave, because they move away or die, while others newly join the community. However, it never disintegrates completely, and the constant presence of Ivy Moore stands for the extreme durability and flexibility of the social relationship that forms the neighbourhood in *Number 5*. Ivy constitutes such an important aspect of the network of social relations portrayed in the novel, because she remains welcoming, civic-minded, compassionate and involved throughout all narratives and thus imbibes key characteristics of Patterson's urban society.

### **City Scenes**

All four novels stress the social dimension of the city as they describe urban scenes that become alive with Belfast inhabitants, and which often focus on and portray the city's vibrant nightlife. Characteristically these descriptions are firmly situated within the urban centre, including the material space in their representation. They counter an image of Belfast that paints the city as a tightly regulated environment, controlled by paramilitary organisations and the army. Only once do any of the texts refer to this negative image devoid of human presence. Larry in *That Which Was* describes the city's atmosphere in the early 1970s, at a time when a ring of steel around the centre closed it off almost completely in the evenings. "The weird thing about Belfast in those days, the city



centre – the dead centre – was more like the sticks than the sticks. Bars with next to no one in them. You could hear a glass being wiped. People came into town who didn't want to meet anybody. Old fellas and fugitives, that was the height of it" (TWW 234). Mostly, however, Glenn Patterson uses the atmosphere of crowded bars and the babble of voices to establish the space of the city centre as a multifaceted and colourful environment awash with social interaction. In these passages the subjects within the urban complex define the city and come together in order to democratically assemble manifold and diverse stories, forming the heart of Belfast. Thus, human life reclaims the city and turns it into a living and flexible space. Even *Number 5*, whose setting is predominantly limited to the suburban neighbourhood, includes a short description of the city's nightlife, emphasising its versatile character, when Tan waits to be admitted to a busy nightclub: "The queue seemed to me pretty representative of the city's current youth styles" (N5 174).

Other texts, above all *Fat Lad*, grant the description of different groups more space, and the "old fellas" who are left well alone in Larry's description in *That Which Was* must share the public space with the young generation that demands its space in *Fat Lad*, whether they like it or not:

With their backs to the wall of the bar they pretended all was as it had been, continuing to converse below the racket of the newly installed jukebox in their arcane language of Yankees, quads, tricasts and ten-bob doubles. Indeed, listening to them talk, you would hardly have known they were in the same bar as the young people at all. (FL 50)

Combining Drew's memories of his childhood and youth with the city he experiences upon his return, *Fat Lad* reveals similarities between the past and the present despite the menacing presence of paramilitary violence in the 1980s. In the text's descriptions, it appears that a delegation of various social groupings occupies city centre bars, countering the controlled isolation of the city:

Drew drank [in Finney's] most weekends in the spring and summer of his last year at school after the bar was taken up, in a mysterious way that bars such as Finney's were taken up in those pre-Belfast-is-buzzing days, as though telepathically agreed

upon, by bikers, mods, punks, skins, now romantics and old hippies, by art students, Queen's students, schoolkids, dolekids, apprentices, junior bank clerks and musicians: aspiring, despairing and just plain desperate. Taken up, moreover, by teenage girls as well as teenage boys, the former stimulating, like an overdose of oestrogen, a sudden growth of female toilets in hitherto resolutely male bars. (FL 49)

The city's various youth groupings congregate in Finney's, united in the wish to enjoy themselves and have a good time. This predicament still holds true ten years on, when the already buzzing city accommodates queues of students. They, like the diverse groupings of the past, meet peacefully, accepting their differences and ignoring the constructed borders that paramilitary groups have erected. The youthful amalgamation in Finney's opposes the destruction of cross-communal social interaction, just as the students of present-day Belfast pit themselves against a religious polarisation of society. Drew witnesses this trend during a night out in town:

There were queues everywhere, it seemed, the longest of them for a students-only night (and therefore including, presumably, at least some Catholics) outside a bar-cum-nightclub in Sandy Row, a matter of yards from the Rangers Supporters Club – seat of the local chapter of the Rome-o-phobic Society – and a matter of feet from the spot where every July the famous Twelfth arch was raised. (FL 49)

The image of the city propounded in *Fat Lad* defies the religious polarisation and limitation paramilitary groups strive to impose on the urban society. It establishes Belfast's society as an amalgamation of a plethora of different groupings, who unite against limiting influences without giving up their distinct identities. It portrays the majority of the city's inhabitants as opposed to paramilitary regulations and social interaction as free-flowing and an integral component of city life.

The social in the paragraphs quoted above is already bound up with a specific spatial setting of night clubs and bars in order to establish it as an important part of the urban imaginary in the novel. This combination of different spatial levels is even more apparent in two extracts taken from both *Fat Lad* and *That Which Was*. Not only do they resemble each other considerably in their construction, they also clearly include the three aspects of urbanity that this thesis

proclaims make up Glenn Patterson's imagination of Belfast. In *Fat Lad*, Drew witnesses city folk enjoying the first rays of sunshine before the backdrop of the capital's centre:

The GCSE and A-level students have abandoned the revision station to join the shop assistants, building works and office clerks eating Wimpys and Marks and Spencer sandwiches in the ground of the City Hall. They sit on coats and jumpers (for appearances are deceptive and, despite the May sunshine, deep in the earth it has just turned March) or cluster about the plinths of the statues and monuments which face out on three of the four sides of Donegall Square: Queen Victoria, Empress of India, the Marquis of Dufferin, Viceroy of the same, annexor of Burma, ambassador to Turkey; Sir Edward Harland, shipbuilder to the world, left hand resting on the model of an unknown ship, back turned on the memorials to the fallen of the Boer war and the drowned (Irish) of his own yard's (Irish) Titanic. (FL 201)

The architecture becomes the backdrop on which current life in all its diversity is played out. In this scene the image of Belfast is composed firstly of a spatial level, represented by the grand buildings and monuments that can be clearly placed on a street map, secondly of a temporal level, as the statues constitute reminders of historical developments and events, and thirdly of a social level, when Belfast's inhabitants come together at the square to enliven the city and give it meaning and purpose in the present.

Significantly, *That Which Was* includes a scene that shares many characteristics with the paragraph above. It too includes both spatial and temporal markers of Belfast, while emphasising the heterogeneity of its inhabitants:

When he worked at the university branch Avery would often take his lunch in the cafeteria of the Ulster Museum, across the road from the bank, in the grounds of the Botanic Gardens. He would always bring a book, though if there was a table free by the cafeteria's window he would spend more time looking out over the perimeter wall into the old Friar's Bush cemetery – for the friar's bush itself – where legend had it mass was celebrated in penal law times. There was a plague pit in there too. It bent the mind to comprehend what those two words contained. Plague pit.

On warm days he wouldn't bother with the museum, but would buy a sandwich and find a spot on the grass to spread his jacket among the snoggers, the sun-worshippers, the full-time cider drinkers and lunchtime soccer stars. (TWW 177)

The positive and colourful images of Belfast painted in the two texts resemble each other remarkably. Both describe scenes that highlight the diverse composition of the city's inhabitants in a specific setting that identifies the urban environment unmistakably. They both include references to the city's history, and what is more, they specifically indicate the tragedy of lost lives. In *Fat Lad* the stately statues share their space with the monument for the drowned of the Titanic – ordinary people whose death does not count any less. Similarly the plague pit invokes strong feelings when Avery laments the many unknown dead who lie there. The consideration for the “ordinary folk” is something that infuses Patterson's entire work. The illustration of the assembled multitude of inhabitants in both texts highlights this accordingly, when it is favourably illuminated by the sun, turning the allusions to the dead back into a positive and colourful picture. Spatial, historical and social aspects of the city come together, forming a multi-faceted and ever evolving image of Belfast.

The natural cycle of life and death is also what ensures the continuous renewal of the urban. Infinite life narratives evolve and develop. While some end, others begin in the city, appropriating it anew. The birth of Avery's son illuminates Belfast as a place of renewal and life:

People queued, crossed roads, walked in, walked out of shops as though they had been summoned – the very light that shone on them had been summoned – by a baby's cry, and he thought that right at the heart of the Christian message was a restatement of what we all felt to be true. The world was born again into hope with each and every one of our children. The day after tomorrow was Advent. Today and for all the days of his life this was David's city. (TWW 201)

Like the community in *Number 5* the city reinvents itself with the arrival of every new individual, incorporating it in its social space. At the same time, however, and also contrary to this, the capacity for remembering the dead remains intact and enables the social network to function properly.

### **Memory and Remembrance**

The subject of memory and remembrance is addressed repeatedly in Glenn Patterson's novels. This aspect of social interaction is closely linked with the temporal dimension of the texts' urban representation that I focus on in the

following chapter. Patterson establishes it as a vital characteristic of urban social life and shows it to influence social interaction significantly. Jude Bloomfield too points towards the importance of memory and historicity for the city: “The collective and individual memories of a city, key events in its history, moments of celebration and commiseration, inauguration and burials, give resonance to the urban fabric and inform desires for the city’s future” (54). Patterson makes the same distinction as Bloomfield, addressing both communal as well as individual memory in his novels. He challenges generalising notions of remembrance and stresses the multiplicity of memory, its instability and the liberating potential it thus holds. In his texts “memory is not set in stone but an ongoing process of social reconstruction that is subject to change and collective contestation” (Bloomfield 47). Just as Patterson allows for multiple representations of the city in his texts, he also allows for multiple versions of the past. Because the past and the historical dimension connect an important element of his creations of urbanity, this enforces again the city’s characteristics of plurality, instability and flexibility.

In *Number 5* Ivy constitutes a container of both personal and of communal memories throughout the whole novel. She connects the individual chapters and narratives through her presence and her continuous act of recalling former inhabitants, fulfilling an important aspect in the social network. As she shares and discusses her individual memories with her neighbours, she provides the basis for a sense of historicity in the estate and turns personal recollections into communally owned memory. Andràs Hideg’s fate, for example, has long become a piece of collective memory for the estate, with Ivy perpetuating his story over the years. Even Mel and Tony, who live at Number 5 twenty years after the man’s death, know it well. “None of this was news to Toni or me. [...] The Hungarian man was in a sense everyone’s history and Ivy’s tone was as a consequence a little more detached, a little less rawly emotional” (N5 266). Ivy’s role as keeper of memories becomes particularly clear at the end of the novel, when she reviews her own life and the many personal dramas and individual narratives she has witnessed on the estate over the years. “I imagined that the memories would get more and more jumbled up, but they’re all there in the proper order, like slides

packed on to the carousel. Just, sometimes more than others, like tonight, the carousel jumps” (N5 289). Her retrospective that ends the narrative one final time, works as a means to connect the five chapters and myriad of individual stories to her and one another, illustrating the extensive social network that informs *Number 5*.

In *The International* Danny ends his narrative in a similar fashion as Ivy, by summoning society’s ability for remembrance as a means of definition and identification. “[Peter Ward] is, I realise, an absence in this story. I wish it were not so, but guns do that, create holes which no amount of words can fill. We’re powerful people for remembering here, I hope that’s one thing we don’t forget” (TI 318). The memory of the dead needs to be cherished in order to be able to move on, because the loss of every individual narrative leaves a blank space that cannot be overwritten. *The International* stresses the importance of memory for the complex construct of society but also points towards the subjectivity of remembrance and the inability to preserve one truth. “Much modern Northern Irish fiction is a remembering; and, as this fiction demonstrates, much remembering is fiction” (Kennedy-Andrews, *(De)-Constructing the North* 113).

This quote applies particularly well to *That Which Was*, which addresses the subject of remembrance most extensively, as its title already suggests. The narrative that centres on Larry and his presumed act of murder during the Troubles focuses on “the uneasy relationship between the present and the past” (Bradford 238), questioning the objectivity and truthfulness of memory and its effects on the present. In *That Which Was*, past events cannot be reconstructed, but always remain subject to interpretation. History, whether personal or official, is a narrative that changes in each telling, time and context.<sup>46</sup> Larry’s story blurs the boundaries between fiction and fact, as Avery becomes convinced of its absolute truth and starts to believe the troubled man’s memories. In the

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<sup>46</sup> Alan Gillis stresses this propensity for change: “The past can only be reconfigured in a present moment, into which the future incessantly looms, and its reconstruction must therefore be perpetually unstable, always likely to be deconstructed by another sense of the past formed at another moment” (186).

increasingly unstable and unreliable narrative Larry constructs, he succeeds in roping Avery into his conspiracy theory, according to which Larry was made to forget a double murder by having had brain surgery forcibly administered to him. Exaggerated and convoluted as it sounds, Larry is not alone in his belief that there are alternative versions to the official history of the country. "Someone had once quipped to Avery that Northern Ireland divided into two camps, those who believed conspiracy theories and those who thought they were being put around to make us all paranoid" (TWW 112). Whether these alternative versions are taken seriously or not, their existence is commonly accepted. As a consequence a reliable historical narration becomes impossible. Believing Larry almost destroys Avery's very existence, and the plot focuses on the perils and dangers the highly contested history still holds today, for Larry's narrative serves as an example of many incidents and developments during the Troubles that cause controversy in the small country: "Without resorting to cumbersome symbolism Patterson causes this man's story to overlap with a mercilessly detailed portrait of the North as a whole, with Avery as the intermediary. For him, Belfast's recent past seems continually to mutate between states of denial, violent retrieval and grotesquely nostalgic remembrance" (Bradford 238). Larry's story does not constitute the only example of unreliable narration and a convoluted notion of the past in *That Which Was*. The visit of the Dalai Lama provides a possibility of alternative narrative interpretation that has a much more positive connotation than Larry's story. Avery attends the lecture in Ulster Hall and experiences a laid-back Buddhist leader who seems to revel in the inconsistencies of narratives and the possibility of misinterpretation.

His English was broken, he said. And he was old. But he would try to manage without an interpreter. He laughed. Broken English. Saves time, but you may get wrong meaning. This was the Ulster Hall, where generations of Unionist party leaders had been elected, where Lord Randolph Churchill had once proclaimed, *Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right!* Not many people who had taken the stage down the years could have been quite so relaxed about being misinterpreted. (TWW 117)

Comparing the Dalai Lama's liberal linguistic openness with the fierce conviction of Lord Randolph Churchill and the exclamation mark putting a definite closure

on his indestructible righteousness ridicules the Northern Irish tendency to close itself off to alternatives. Patterson addresses the never satisfied need for definite meaning and an uncontested version of events in the political sphere of the small country and attributes insecurity of meaning with the positive possibility of multiple interpretations.<sup>47</sup>

The act of remembering the fallen soldiers of Northern Ireland, on the other hand, remains a tightly regulated event for the characters that does not leave room for interpretation. Remembrance Sunday symbolises officially legitimated memory. This is how Avery experiences the memorial day, which as an institution is primarily observed by the Protestant community and is famous for the appropriation of many unionist symbols such as the Union Jack and the national anthem, fraught with political symbolism that threatens to overshadow the dimension of individual memory he labours towards in his service:

To the glorious memory of the members of this congregation who gave their lives in the service of their country. Their names where repeated in black biro on a card beneath the lectern light. Avery scarcely needed to glance down to read them.

Robert Benson, Michael Harbison, Matthew Herbert, Alexander ‘Sandy’ Hope, St John Hope, William Hope, William McElvey, George McIlhenny, Terence McMaster, Oliver Owens, James Ross, John Ross, Norman Stewart... always there was a moment, it came back to him from his own childhood, listening, when it seemed they would go on and on and on, just before – Ashley Thompson – they ended. [...]

In the foreground Avery saw grown-old men and women fill up, remembering. Robert. Michael. Matthew. Alexander-who-got-Sandy. St John, who no doubt got all sorts. The two Williams. George. Terence. Oliver. James. John. Norman. Ashley. Friends, some of them, though you didn’t need to have known them personally to be caught up in the emotion of the moment; the emotion and, yes, the beauty. Like the soft rain of leaves at the end of the televised service. Tens and tens of thousands. He raised a thumb to an itch on his face. It came away wet. (TWW 151-2)

Avery is touched by the emotional character of the moment, yet he is obliged to follow a clearly assigned ceremony in order to ensure the proscribed political symbolism of the acts of remembrance. He inadvertently destroys this symbolism when he forgets to let *God Save the Queen* be sung. “Minister, said Guy without

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<sup>47</sup> In *Literarisierung einer gespaltenen Stadt* Stephanie Schwerter sees this incident in a similar light. However, while she too highlights the opposition between the two positions towards the flexibility of meaning, she also sees the incident as a distinct vilification of not only the whole event but the building itself (236) – a perception I do not share.



preamble, there was no national anthem. Avery's hand dropped. It was not what he had thought they were thinking at all. He said the only word that was left to him. What?" (TWW 153) The impact of this oversight emphasises both the sensitivity of the event and the fact that the past and remembrance of the past in Northern Ireland are still bound up with a national conscience. Remembrance Sunday is an institutionalised opportunity for the Protestants to strengthen their identity within tradition. Any alterations to this are not received benevolently. The text establishes this connection between the religious and national communal identity and the fixed remembrance of an official past in order to deconstruct it within Larry's tale. His narrative demonstrates clearly that no such thing as a true account of the past exists, but that the past always remains unknown and unknowable to a certain extent. Patterson himself puts it thus: "[W]e have to recognize that memory is not stable. [...] We have to allow that there are as many versions of the past as there are individuals who experienced that past. Simply saying that means that you can't come up with an absolute version of what that past was" (Hicks 116). Therefore a common identity cannot be based upon a claim of truth with reference to the past but must rather be based on constructed and ideological criteria. In the end the individual wins over any attempt to form a homogeneous mass of people. During the service Avery calls out the name of every man who has given his life, giving them their individual character. The mention of friends and family, but also their nicknames, given to them by people who would have known them personally, indicates the place they have taken in the social network of Belfast inhabitant, and in which their traces are still noticeable. *That Which Was* distinguishes between institutionalised remembrance and individual memory in Northern Ireland, writing against the utilization of remembrance in order to construct sectarian differences and identities. Instead the novel attempts to individualise narratives and to introduce an openness for different versions of the past, stressing the multiplicity of narratives that are part of and constantly change the urban complex, for "the memory, history and identity of a city are not the emanation of an enclosed, hermetically sealed, 'pure' group and their past, but the ongoing social construction of people with diverse histories whose lives intersect in a specific place" (Bloomfield 46).

The individual is again central in the chronology that Avery peruses in a public library. In it every single victim of the Troubles is democratically and methodically listed in the book, emphasising the enormity of the loss in their individual stories, but also in their sheer number. In praising the authors' approach of remembering the Troubles, *That Which Was* highlights the importance of personal narratives once again: "A book had been published the previous year, a chronology, with details of all the people killed in the thirty-three years since 1966. It was a work of great integrity and restraint, entirely without sensationalism or sentimentality, a labour of the author's true love for their fellow Northern Irish men and women" (TWW 56). The second part of this quote suggests an involvement with the Northern Irish people that also infuses Patterson's literary representation of Belfast. In portraying a city, he portrays its people, letting the reader take part in the life stories of his characters and spinning an intricate network of social relations around them. With the topical focus on memory and recollections this network stretches into urban history and includes past events and life stories. Unreliable narration and narrators show the instability of such history, challenging rigid notions of it. Furthermore, Patterson defies the notion of an institutionalised remembrance that loses sight of the individual's importance, as he emphasises personal fates in his novels over standardised versions of the past that are supposed to evoke a sense of unified experience. Laura Pelaschiar quotes the post-colonial critic Catherine Hall in order to stress the importance of the individual experience over homogeneous identities. Hall sees the post-colonial approach as "a history which involves recognition and the re-working of memory. A history which shows how fantasized constructions of homogeneous nations are constructed and the other possibilities which are always there. A history which is about difference, not homogeneity" (qtd. in *Writing the North* 14). This difference finds expression in the multitude of individual life stories Patterson portrays in his novels. They do not serve to establish one grand narrative but show a kaleidoscope of alternatives.

## From Binarism to Inclusion

The emphasis on difference infuses also the communities portrayed in the novels. These communities are not forced upon the characters but are joined voluntarily. They are not all-consuming markers of identity but allow for an alternative and sometimes contradicting characterisation of its members as individuals. In *Lapsed Protestant* Glenn Patterson mocks the narrow meaning of the term community, referring to the bipolar categorisation of society into a Catholic and a Protestant community:<sup>48</sup> “*Communities*. A polite term for sides. There are apparently only two, though where this leaves the Chinese community, the Indian community, the Gay community, etc. is anybody’s guess” (2). Accordingly, some of his most vivid descriptions oppose this categorisation and establish a link between the two opposing groups. The urban setting supports this deconstruction of sectarian differences. Ideologies of nationalism and exclusiveness do not fit into the characteristics of the city:

The polysemous fabric of the urban space, its implication in historical process, disrupts not only the seamlessly homogeneous linguistic and communal attachment of Irish Nationalism and Unionism, but also the hierarchical ordering of social space [...]. The city as contestatory, imaginative terrain is the opposite of the closed system of the nation. The city is itself an alternative narrative, or producer and repository of transgressive narratives and histories. (Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland* 87)

Whereas the nation defines itself in the exclusion of the ‘other’ and permits only one national narrative, the city, as a complex comprised of an indefinite number of narratives, revels in multitude.<sup>49</sup> Inclusive alternatives to the communities constructed by sectarian sentiments become possible and manifold identification is allowed.

In *Number 5* all characters are aware of the prescribed segregation of communities according to religion, and most disregard it. On the occasion of Penny’s baptism

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<sup>48</sup> One of them always constitutes the unwanted ‘Other’, depending on the national narrative that applies – the British or the Irish.

<sup>49</sup> Horst Weich characterises the city as a dynamic complex that constantly breaks open restrictive structures. “[So ist] die Großstadt begreifbar als wesentlich dynamische Struktur, deren *definiens* es ist, die Geschlossenheit aufzubrechen und darin die ihr gesetzten Grenzen kontinuierlich zu sprengen” (38).

“[m]any of the neighbours walked behind the pram with Harry and me to the christening, even some like the Quinns and the McGuinnesses whose consciences would let them accompany us no further than the church door” (N5 31). Here a sense of belonging to the same neighbourhood is still stronger than the prescribed religious affiliations. Even after many of the Catholic neighbours in the street have yielded to the pressure of the erupting violence and left the estate, their absence is acutely felt within the remaining social network. *Number 5* does not exclude the consequences of the Troubles, but the characters of *Number 5* establish the building as an ‘Everyhouse’ in Laura Pelaschiar’s sense, when the everyday problems and domestic lives dominate their narratives, like they do in cities around the world. This normality is never completely superseded by the Troubles, although they definitely feature in the novel. People move away and emigrate for political reasons. Flags are flown, even on the estate, and anti-Catholic sentiment can be heard in the now predominantly Protestant environment. Rodney repeatedly alludes to such incidents and the politically charged atmosphere at neighbourhood gatherings. But for him the distinguishing categories are not Protestant/British or Catholic/Irish. Far from embracing that binarism, he regrets its social effects, and he and his contemporaries feel the absence of their Catholic neighbours who had to move away. “There was silence. Had anybody had word from Ann or Hugh? Michael and Patricia Kelly? The Quinns? The mood dipped again” (N5 100). Rodney has much more trouble relating to the younger generation than to somebody not his religious persuasion. In *Number 5*, the intolerance and barriers between young and old, or between genders for that matter,<sup>50</sup> are much more pronounced than those between Protestants and Catholics, and Patterson uses this as one way of destabilizing the bipolar conception of Northern Irish society.

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<sup>50</sup> Rodney encounters the youth of the estate on his trips to the high street and finds it impossible to connect to them (N5 104-6). The young Tan on the other hand regards András Hideg and the other men on the street as a foreign species he can observe (N5 139). Catriona’s husband disapproves of the lifestyle of his young successors in the house (N5 234). As for gender, I cover the differences addressed in *Number 5* and the changing roles of gender through time in the next chapter. These instances show clear differentiations, and despite them not being in any sense radical, they feature much more heavily in the narratives than religious differences.

Catriona's narrative turns another consequence of the Troubles into criticism of the conflict and establishes Belfast's society as a network of individual relationships. The religious meetings her family organises, stand in contrast to the prescribed and superficial religiousness the paramilitary groupings have utilized for their means. The binarism of Protestant against Catholic these groupings perpetrate relies on a notion of religion that is very much equated with nationality. To be Protestant means to be British, to be Catholic means to be Irish. The rift between the two categories is built on the assumption that you can only belong to one nation. The actual religious faiths play very little or no role. The most fervent ambassadors of the binarism do not define themselves as religious but as political.<sup>51</sup> Patterson subverts this politicised notion of religion and emphasises its difference to an apolitical religious belief. In *Number 5* the Eliot family experiences a sudden resurgence of religious faith, which complicates family relationships. Steve and Catriona cannot be called enthusiastic atheists. They are more like 'lapsed Protestants', born into their faith but no longer practising. Like Danny's parents and some of the Belfast people Ken Avery tries to redirect towards the congregation in *That Which Was*, they simply seem to have lost their religious beliefs. As people are preoccupied with the complexities of everyday life, they no longer set aside a space for religion, nor do they let religion dominate their lives. Additionally, in a city as ridden with religious prejudice as Belfast, they are more than a little wary of too much belief. When first their daughter and then their son consider themselves saved, the parents seriously question their pedagogical abilities. Steve especially finds it hard to accept this turn of events: "His gaze was moving from our son's intent face to our daughter's in a long, slow shake. He raised his eyes to mine. Where did we go wrong? they asked" (N5 209). In a reversal of common assumptions Patterson portrays a family that, at least at the beginning, is everything but deeply steeped in the religious traditions of their community, and that is thrown into a crisis as the children turn towards faith. In *Number 5* religion is not seen in connection to the

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<sup>51</sup> The Reverend Ian Paisley being the famous exception to prove the rule. But he too is seen as a highly political person, who has not become famous for his belief in God but for his conviction of the superior right of the Protestant-British to rule Northern Ireland.

political conflict raging in the city. The novel puts the emphasis instead on the word 'faith,' something that does not seem to play a role in the political sphere. Patterson strictly separates between true believing and the empty concept the political activists utilise in order to validate the exclusive binarism, and he thus takes this justification away from them. He even portrays the return to faith as an outcry against the conflict and its ensuing violence. Jill Hideg joins the meetings after having lost her husband András in the paramilitary attack and tries to find consolidation in religion. She is not the only one:

After Jill came Andrea, her married daughter, and a friend of Andrea's. Maura, who had lost a brother in a bomb, and Maura's husband, Noel. Word did what word was supposed to do in these circumstances – spread. After twenty-odd years of people being blown up and shot in this city you hardly needed a divining rod to pick up on the pain. It seemed not to matter that Steve had caused his own share of suffering once upon a time. If anything the others looked up to him as the greater sinner repented

From as far back as I could remember, wherever I lived, I could point out the houses where 'wee meetings' were held. (N5 218)

Firstly, the text sets the religious faith displayed by the characters in contrast to the empty categories employed by political activists. Secondly, it emphasises the many relationships characterising the social interaction. The people of Belfast form a network of friends, family and acquaintances through which information travels. The omnipresence of 'wee meetings' throughout Belfast and Catriona's detailed knowledge of them emphasise the fact that this network of relationships and personal communication is not limited to the suburban neighbourhood of *Number 5* but spans the entire city. In this instance Patterson portrays the estate as one of many similar ones in the city. The neighbourhood becomes a part of a greater urban picture and thus the imagination of the city comes about.

In *That Which Was* Ken Avery consciously includes members of paramilitary organisations within this social structure, although many of his contemporaries think otherwise:

Involuntarily, Avery remembered the phrase that was used to dismiss feud killings when he was growing up: tit-for-tit. Even now plenty of people would tell you the victims of such infighting were no great loss to anyone: a few less for the police to

worry about. Trying to ensure that every death – every life – was accorded equal significance remained one of the hardest battles to fight in this country. Never mind the country, in the clergy. (TWW 46)

His attitude states clearly that every person is unique and every life is important. Avery treats the inhabitants of Belfast equally, seeing them as individuals and not as members of a community or organisation. The quote mirrors the sentiments transported within the paragraph that praises the chronology of the victims of the Troubles. Every loss is equally mourned independently of its religion or political affiliation and leaves its traces. Each death takes away an individual integrated within a network of relations, and each is missed by others. Avery himself finds his first love in the book. The man sitting opposite him in the library almost casually mentions the entry of his son. During his investigations concerning Larry's alleged killing, Avery meets the victim's brother. Again he is confronted with the lasting grief and memories of close relatives.

By focusing on the story of an East Belfast minister, Patterson again directs attention towards a notion of religion that is spiritual rather than political. The binarism between Protestant and Catholic is diluted as clergymen of both sides are aware of analogies between the denominations. Ken Avery forms a close friendship with the Catholic priest Des, whose advice in religious as well as social matters he values highly. It is at Des's place that Avery contemplates

a print of the Blessed Virgin, palms outstretches, robed in radiant white and blue. To some on the wilder fringes of his Church, this Mary was at best a rival twin of theirs, smuggled away at birth and favoured with a more gilded upbringing. At worst she was a blasphemous pretender. Queen of Heaven, indeed. No doubt the same people would have been appalled by Reverend Twiss's glossing of their two-in-oneness as Dress-up and Dress-down Mary. (TWW 100)

Reverend Twiss, Avery's former instructor and role model, disdains the old binarism once again when he regards humour as the foremost means of differentiation between believers. "Forget Protestant and Catholic, forget high and low, this is the line along which today's Church divides" (TWW 38). Demonstrating his ecumenical views the Reverend introduces an alternative category, and thus effectively suspends the old ones.

But as the image of the Catholic version of Mary as a blasphemous pretender shows, not all congregational members will as readily forgo the binary ideology as Reverend Twiss would have them do it. The cross-community football tournament Des and Avery organise together constitutes an example of the clergymen's numerous attempts to overcome the oppositions dividing their congregations, oppositions epitomised by the children's sporting dresses. Avery's young participants wear the jersey of a famous Scottish football team traditionally supported by Protestants. "Beneath almost all the tracksuits, girls' and boys', could be seen the NTL sponsor's logo on one or other version of that season's Glasgow Rangers strip" (TWW 42). Des's players on the other hand sport the shirt of the Catholic equivalent:

Avery spotted Des among a cluster of mainly boys in Glasgow Celtic tops. He also spotted something else. The letters on the chest of the Celtic jerseys. NTL: They were sponsored by the same company as Rangers.  
Why was it so hard for people to believe that God didn't take sides either? (TWW 43)

The irony of one sponsor for two supposed enemies effectively cancels out the binarism of Glasgow Rangers against Celtic Glasgow and by extension that of Protestant against Catholic. The rivalry of the two teams disappears under the three identical letters that join the fans of both clubs. NTL merges the seemingly incompatible binarism.

This particular cross-community initiative fails despite Avery's awareness of some most apparent similarities, but many others achieve at least a temporary convergence of the two opposing groups, proving that the binarism cannot resist some incentives to overcome rigid differences:

Cross-community initiatives of one kind or another were as old as the Troubles themselves. According to some arithmetic of deprivation, the less contact you'd had with members of the other religion, the more likely you were to be sent to the United States with them. Avery, whose early childhood at least had been spent in a relatively mixed area, had got no further than an interfaith camp in the wilds above Ballycastle on the north Antrim coast, where he went twice in his teens with a group from his local church. [...]

His first time, Avery had got drunk at every opportunity like everybody else, Protestant and Catholic. Forget the table tennis, the greatest camaraderie was built up on the illicit runs to the nearest country bar with an off-sales. (TWW 32)



Far from being inconsolably divided communities, Catholics and Protestants in *That Which Was* are portrayed as sharing many similarities. The prescribed differences are overcome frequently, and ultimately the individual ranks indefinitely higher than any religious or political affiliations.

In *The International*, Danny proves the binarism obsolete by his very existence. In a city whose schools have always been and whose streets are beginning to be strictly segregated by religion, Danny has none. Brought up non-religiously, his mother and father unite the two apparently mutually exclusive faiths in their marriage, if one can speak of faiths at all when neither of them believes in anything much:

[I]n this most God-obsessed of cities they had lost their religion. It was not that they were atheist, or even agnostic, at least not actively; one had been born Catholic, the other Protestant – in the absence of grandparents I was never quite sure which was which – but it was as though when they met their native faiths had somehow cancelled each other out.

No church marked my arrival into the world and I have left instructions that none is to mark my leaving. (TI 41-2)

The way in which the parents achieve this status makes their lack of religious denomination especially noteworthy. Far from openly rebelling against the status quo in Northern Ireland, they do not actively seek to disassociate themselves from religion, but they simply lose it. By portraying this loss not so much as a conscious act but as a natural development, the text denies categorisation according to religion its legitimacy. Being Catholic or Protestant does not constitute an essential denomination everyone is credited with at birth, but they rather have a choice not to comply with the binarism. Danny's resistance takes on an active form when he declares his plans for his own burial. While the fact that no church marked his birth was not up to him, he consciously excludes it from his death, choosing a wholly secular lifestyle. In Belfast this constitutes also an intention to remain outside the existing religious binarism and to remain neutral in the face of open hatred between the two groups. In a political climate that increasingly insists on partiality, this neutrality sometimes proves difficult to

maintain. Accordingly, Danny is suitably shocked at being called a ‘Prod’ by his colleague Jamesie (TI 255). The hotel constitutes a neutral microcosm, “which stands apart from the increasing polarisation and rigidity of the larger society outside its doors” (Kennedy-Andrews, *(De-)Constructing the North* 112), the politics of the day, as discussed within its walls, still excluding the growing conflict. The staff of the hotel form a tightly knit community in which they look out for each other: “As [Lar] and Jamesie were leaving, Priscilla called out to them to be careful. Priscilla always did. Jamesie promised her they would be. Jamesie always did, gently without sarcasm” (TI 299). Because of this inclusive atmosphere a casual remark by Jamesie stands out as a serious breach of conduct. “*Prods?* The word caught me like a sharp stick under the ribs. No one in The International had ever made such a direct mention of religion to me” (TI 255). Despite Jamesie’s apology, Danny realises how fragile the hotel’s neutrality has become. The binary ideology that has taken hold of the city, threatens to invade this microcosm, too. Referring Peter Ward’s murder on Malvern Street, Danny seriously questions whether the neutral and non-sectarian environment of the place can be relied upon outside of it:

“I forgot, we’re none of us anything,” Jamesie said. “We’re International barmen.”

The notion had never struck me as so heroic, nor so entirely hollow. The International was no protection to its four barmen drinking after hours in the Malvern Arms that Saturday night last June. (TI 256)

In *The International* Patterson shows the development of the pervasive binarism that increasingly defines Belfast society in the late 1960s. At the same time, however, he constructs the hotel as a powerful counter-setting that strives towards neutrality and humanity, making it difficult for the binarism to take a hold of it and to infect the people working in it. The International constitutes a space that remains open towards new possibilities, as it enables Danny to make his numerous encounters. The young barman epitomizes the practice of remaining outside the generic classification system by combining two exclusive categories within himself. He challenges the binarism firstly by refuting its legitimacy and secondly by refusing to take seriously its most adamant ambassadors. They are

portrayed as a small extremist minority that the rest of the population wonders at, partly amused, partly uncomprehending. They joke about the chambermaid who throws a bottle at the Queen's and Prince Philip's car, the common acceptance "that she was not in full possession of her senses" (TI 95) discrediting the sincerity of her motive. Similarly, the Evangelical Protestant Society is dismissed as a minor disturbance. "Everyone knew the Evangelical Protestant Society were fruitcakes, but as fruitcakes go they were harmless enough" (TI 88). In comparison, Danny credits Reverend Paisley with more influence on the mind-sets of the population, but he nevertheless refuses to take it seriously: "Ian Paisley was basically a joke that became less funny each time you heard it. In fact he was so unfunny now it was starting to hurt, very badly. Whether he was dropped on his head when he was a baby or what, his eyes saw catastrophe at every turn" (TI 88). Danny regards Paisley's combination of paranoia and demagoguery as a threat. However, he still denies the Reverend legitimacy. "[N]ot in full possession of her senses", "fruitcakes", "dropped on the head when he was a baby": Danny considers advocates of the exclusive binarism insane, and the majority of the population depicted in *The International* remains for the most part apolitical and uninvolved in the conflict. The paramilitary organisations starting up in Belfast are portrayed as small groupings only:

Paisley marched around the country trying to convince the Protestant people of Ulster that they were in need of his salvation [...] and, while most ignored him, not a few of them came along every Sunday to the church he had built for himself to be scared more. Others joined his Ulster Constitution Defence Committee and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers and marched around the country behind him. A handful formed a volunteer force of their own. The previous May a letter was sent to the papers declaring war on the IRA and its splinter groups. It was news to most people that there was enough of an IRA to splinter. (TI 88-9)

While the aggressive groupings remain small and inconsequential, the majority of urban society practices inclusion and acceptance. Such a network of relations and social interaction especially characterises *The International Hotel*, but it also expands to encompass the urban space when Danny walks the street of his city. He constantly engages in communication with his fellow inhabitants of Belfast,

exchanging winks and nudges, witnessing even small signs of emotions with the perceptiveness of someone who feels great affection for the people (TI 15, 62).

In *The International* the seemingly pervasive Northern Irish binarism of Protestant against Catholic is refuted in several ways. The ostensibly exclusive categories are amalgamated in the person of Danny. The same categories cancel each other out in Danny's parents, thereby revealing the ubiquity of the binarism a fallacy. To further strengthen this argument, The International Hotel constitutes a microcosm in which the categories are not applicable either. Additionally, the binarism is shown to seem persuasive to a small minority of the people of Northern Ireland only, while for the rest of society the religious categorisation does not matter. Patterson acknowledges the idea of the binarism, but by merging the opposites and thus undermining their legitimacy, he creates alternative possibilities that effectively suspend the exclusive oppositions. Belfast society is constituted by a number of individuals that form a set of relations and choose their own affiliations. Such a portrayal can be found in all of Patterson's novels, and it emphasises the city as a complex and inclusive multiplicity.

For all the emphasis on portraying the people as a group of individuals who consciously and willingly join one or more communities that form the urban society, many characters also retain reservations against fitting themselves into this social construct. While the individual and the community are not seen as exclusive oppositions in Glenn Patterson's texts, they still remain difficult to consolidate at times. In *Fat Lad* Drew feels apart from both the urban society and the community of his family, and so does Avery in *That Which Was*, as he continues to consort with Larry. His congregation and his family turn against him and exclude him from their midst. In *The International* Danny needs to keep part of his personality hidden in order to remain accepted within the community of his work environment and his family. At the same time, he also establishes a link to a group of individuals who do not fit social norms and live their homosexuality in secret. In *Number 5* especially Stella at times feels the need to disassociate herself from the community, mainly because the existing social norms confine and constrict her individualism.

## **Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity**

Stella's narrative illustrates that the four novels also include matters such as gender into their portrayal of the urban society. Patterson not only uses this categorization to diversify the social complex of his urban representation, but also questions the validity of prevalent gender roles within social communities and their effect on the individual. While the majority of the narrators are male, many of the texts include female perspectives. Amongst these, especially Stella is troubled by the expectations society imposes on her and fears she cannot fulfil the role allotted to her. The 1950s in *Number 5* are characterised by clear-cut rules of behaviour for both genders. The man acts as the bread winner, while the woman stays at home looking after the house and the children. Class differences notwithstanding, gender roles are clearly defined. The character of Stella draws attention to these circumstances and introduces an element of rebellion to this fixed system. *Number 5* portrays rules of society as persuasive and dominant, but in including characters who oppose this normative life, the text also emphasises the constructedness of such rules and draws attention to the possibility of circumnavigating and changing them. Stella grapples with various aspects of her prescribed role as a housewife and mother, yet she does not opt for open rebellion. Her resistance is of a much quieter sort, and it mirrors Patterson's soft subversion of any aspect of city life that could limit the urban landscape to a singular dominant imagination. Instead of accepting her fate unquestioningly, Stella wonders about her life as a married woman, looking at it from various points of view. "Men, I thought, must puzzle over what their women did while they were at work. (I had puzzled about it myself before I was married)" (N5 17). In this short remark she deconstructs the essentialist view of gender norms. Not only does she question the sense in this social order herself, but she attributes the sentiment to the other gender as well. Stella's narrative portrays her as a woman caught between the desire to live her life according to her own beliefs and the need to fit into her prescribed role. She is neither an undoubting member of society nor an open reformer. Like with so many others of Patterson's characters, Stella's rebellion happens on a small-scale and personal level. A fight with her husband illustrates as much. Bored by her task of looking after the empty house all day

long, Stella organises a job for herself at O'Neill's timber mill. Her husband Harry, however, opposes the idea vehemently.

"You cannot indeed." Harry said.

"What do you mean, I cannot indeed? Who says I can't?"

"I do, that's who."

"Oh, Harry, come off it." (N5 26)

While the two of them seem to lead a happy marriage based on equality, Harry is not yet prepared to communicate this fact to the public. Stella's new job would have signalled a breaking up of traditional gender roles, and while Harry cannot logically justify his negation and has to resort to patriarchal displays of power, he does not openly defy social norms. Ivy's reaction to Stella's plans and Harry's outburst illustrates the public opinion: "If our fellas had wanted mill girls I'm sure they could have found them" (N5 28). In this case as in many others, Patterson's characters break with social norms on a private level, but not in open rebellion. Gender roles, not only the ones existing during the 1950s but also as they change through the decades,<sup>52</sup> are publicly observed and reflected in the character's lives, but they are not adhered to religiously. Stella gives in to Harry and in the end does not take the job at the timber mill, and yet, she is the one to initiate the family's emigration to Australia, overruling Harry's objections and re-establishing herself as an equal partner in the relationship.

Like gender, other much-discussed and contested aspects of sociality such as sexuality or race lend themselves to small-scale subversions of existing rules. Patterson uses these deviations to portray a social complex in which the individual has the possibility to diverge from the norm. In his representation of Belfast the network that spans across the entire city on the one hand provides security, a sense of belonging and an opportunity for social interaction. On the other hand, it also comprehends certain expectations and rules of behaviour, which are implicitly and explicitly disseminated within the network.

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<sup>52</sup> The changing gender roles in Glenn Patterson's text are addressed again in the following chapter, when I focus on temporality and historical developments.

After Danny's first practical experiences of homosexuality, and thus his first deviation from social expectations, the seriousness of his deed is brought home to him first by teachers and then by his parents during a sleepless night. "Around dawn it was decided that I should leave the country altogether and go to stay in one of those places where the Christmas cards came from" (TI 48). His guardians' initial reaction does not indicate a desire to stop his 'abnormal' behaviour, although the fear of "corrupting influences" (TI 48) plays into the considerations as well, but rather speaks of a need to keep the deviation private. Danny is sent away to stop the information flow of the urban grapevine before it begins and to remove the subject of talk from people's eyes and minds. Just as Harry does not consent to Stella's unusual life plans because he fears public admonition, Danny's parents conduct damage control for their own sake. Subsequently, the young man keeps his erotic adventures private and learns to circumnavigate social rules in his pursuit of men. Frank, one of the men he meets, gives him vital advice on it:

Walking back towards The International that day in July he had said that the most important lesson I could learn was to be alert at all times. Men like us, he said, were scared, a lot of them, and with good cause. You might get no more than a glance, a gesture, a half-sentence, before they shied away. You never knew what you might miss if you weren't quick to pick up the signs. (TI 100)

In Danny's case homosexual acts not only deviate from social norms but are against the law and can result in legal prosecution. Despite this fact and the heightened sensitivity homosexuals need to develop because of it, Danny's narrative describes sexual encounters of many kinds as a common occurrence and suggests a level of acceptance within society that is at odds with the legal situation. The young man regards the hunt for his next forbidden adventure as a playful pastime, emboldened by the conviction that "[h]otels are places where people go hoping for sex" (TI 96). In *The International* respectable couples are revealed to have a penchant for threesomes, exposing society's negation of open sexuality as a superficial rule that can easily be circumnavigated. Frank specifically determines Belfast as a place in which sexual encounters are frequently possible. "He told me he normally enjoyed coming to Belfast, he always met (he held my eye a second then focused on the tip of his cigarette)

interesting people. ‘In Belfast?’ I laughed. I don’t know why” (TI 97). Despite Danny’s initial doubts about this revelation, he continues to include his own experiences in his narrative, proving Frank’s statement correct: “There had been women as well, the odd time. Why not? I was just eighteen, I was having fun, and once you switch on there is no telling what signals you will pick up” (TI 101). Danny’s casual encounters and sexual adventures establish the urban society as a space in which experiments and new experiences are possible, despite appearances that suggest otherwise. Seemingly closed systems and gridlocked norms are opened up to offer alternative perspectives. Patterson does not present an urban society that as a whole craves constant renewal and welcomes change with open arms. Rather than painting such an extreme picture, he emphasises the normality of the city’s inhabitants and directs attention to small and personal acts of individual rebellion against the status quo, which leave an impact nevertheless. The society exhibits a potential for change that is not imposed onto it from the outside, for example from official authority or an extremist grouping, but that originates within that society itself.

Similarly, *Number 5* introduces alternative perspectives on the issues of race that show a society torn between exclusion and acceptance. The Tans constitute a racial irregularity within the suburban estate of the narrative. While the predominant considerations on the integration of different ethnicities in Northern Ireland limit themselves to discussions on “mixed company” (N5 84), as Rodney puts it, the presence of the Chinese immigrant family makes sure that the bipolarity consisting of a Catholic and a Protestant ethnicity is extended to comprehend other influences. The Tans’ story emphasises that the different strata of society are by no means only differentiated according to religious lines. A third category of differentiation is introduced that actually indicates there might be a fourth or fifth such category, and who knows how many more. With the help of the Tans’ otherness, Patterson interjects an alternative set of choices in the exclusive opposition and thereby undermines it significantly.

The faltering acceptance and low-scale impact of the narrative once more illustrates Patterson’s style of representation of urban society. The Tans do not



turn social norms upside down or have a major effect on the city as a whole. Their presence rather commences a hesitant process of reconfiguring perspectives with their neighbours. Far from a black and white picture, the Tans' narrative tells of a shifting and complex relationship forming between the groups. They are not greeted with full-on hatred, despite the repeated attacks on their privacy, but they are never fully integrated either. The son's friendship with Tit symbolises this two-sided relationship. On the one hand Tit and Tan appear to nourish a symbiotic connection, which they record on the physical space of the city, leaving their trade mark graffiti T'n'T. On the other hand, Tan is continuously confronted with Tit's less than friendly environment, and he repeatedly renders accounts of racial assaults more harmless and innocent-looking than they really are, in order to tone down the exotic origins of his family and to make them appear more integrated.

These were carefully edited highlights [...]. I was playing it strictly for laughs. Tit laughed, so that was OK.

Next time I saw him, though, he told me that if anyone did give our family serious grief he'd knock their melt in. What was I going to say? That I used to see his big brother Sid creeping away from our doorstep at dead of night doing up his flies? That the party plate that carried the shit through our letterbox when I was a kid was identical to the ones I saw sitting in a box by his own bin the other year when his ma had a big kitchen clearout?

"Dead on," I said. (N5 129)

It remains unclear whether Tan fears Tit will not believe him, or he dreads to get caught between his friend and his family, but it is clear that he does not want to endanger their friendship with a truthful account of the racial prejudice his family has to fight against. The boy enjoys the feeling of almost unbiased acceptance the relationship provides him with. It gives him a sense of security and superiority similar to the one he feels in the company of his extended family. In the familiar environment of the Chinese restaurant his uncle owns, roles are exchanged and the people with Northern Irish roots constitute the odd ones out:

A few young men walked in out of the dark and sat at the tables nearest the door waiting for takeaways. I think they were disturbed to see so many of us in one place – there could be fifteen, twenty, sometimes more – and I imagined them waking in sweats from dreams where their world was reversed and they were the odd men out. The curiosities. (N5 136)

The episode illuminates the careful and two-sided attitude towards foreign ethnicities. On the one hand the Chinese immigrants are accepted within society, and their restaurant has become a part of the city landscape. On the other hand, however, the young customers feel easily threatened by the presumed differences and tend to regard the immigrants as the others who do not share characteristics with them. Tit betrays such sentiments despite his close friendships with Tan, when he does not even think to apply the otherwise ever-present Northern Irish categorisation to Tan's cousin, who he wants to ask on a date.

“What do you think your ma and da would say?”

“You don't mean to tell me she's a Taig?” Tit said.

I laughed along with my friend, though in fact that's exactly what my cousin was: what I was, if I was anything. Not that it would have occurred to anyone to ask. People in this city seemed to think Chinese was a religion in its own right. (N5 139)

Ironically, the Tans thus escape the stigma almost every other member of society is forced to deal with, whether they want to or not: that of which religious denomination they are born into. During the heyday of the Troubles the Chinese family remain presumably the only Catholics in an otherwise predominantly Protestant neighbourhood. In the Tan's narrative of *Number 5* Patterson firstly extends the conception of the urban society to include other influences. Secondly he shows that the practice of dividing Belfast into two distinct communities is inadequate and limiting. Thirdly he describes a process of inclusion and acceptance of otherness that is riddled with relapses and scepticism and paints a picture of a society that initiates developments on a small-scale and personal level.

### **Conclusion: The Social Perspective**

The social complexes described in the texts greatly influence the imagination of the city in Glenn Patterson's Belfast novels. The characters' narratives invest the urban environment with life and bestow it with meaning. They turn the sterile material space into something that becomes “marked as humanly meaningful” (Buell 145), and thus a distinctive and clearly localised place. The social complexes establish Belfast as a character in its own right, attributing it with

positive qualities of versatility and heterogeneity. The manifold images that the sociality in the novels paints, suggest a complex and shifting environment that encompasses opposites and in which humanity, openness and individuality invariably rank higher than prescribed norms and closed systems. Direct speech and discourse in a broader sense are employed in all four novels as a means of representation. The Belfast accent and local sayings play into this just as much as imaginations of their hometown. Through them the characters express subjective opinions of Belfast and establish themselves not only as representative products but also as performative producers of the city. Contradictory media coverage of urban life creates a multi-faceted image of Belfast that includes inside and outside perspectives, provincial and urban viewpoints as well as local and global aspects of its character. The many micronarratives perpetuated by the media on the one hand, but also by the many individual life stories featuring in the novels on the other hand, establish the city as a container of narratives that cannot be portrayed in its entirety and cannot (and must not) be limited to a single dominant narrative. The theme of the Troubles is put into perspective and integrated, even subordinated within the heterogeneous and democratic pool of urban aspects. The novels firmly invest the term *community* with a meaning beyond political implications and concentrate on the complex relationship between the individual and the communal within multivocal and multifaceted narratives. The creation of a social complex does not foreclose individual development, and every single subject constitutes a vital part of urban society – an aspect of city life that is emphasised again and again in the novels. People die, others are born, still others move on, but all leave their unmistakable traces on the social landscape of the city. They form a lasting network of relationships that spans the city and highlights the interconnectedness, simultaneity and heterogeneity of the countless micronarratives. These aspects become apparent again when issues of gender, race and sexuality are considered. Patterson's characters frequently deviate from the normative rules of society, developing as individuals and demonstrating the potential for change inherent to the city. In the novels, Belfast and its social complex never stand still but constantly change and develop. The jumble of micronarratives that make up the city ensures this.

## **The Temporal Perspective**

This unceasing development of the city constitutes a central issue in the following chapter. After looking closely at Glenn Patterson's imaginations of both the material and the social spaces of Belfast, I now turn to the temporal component of his urban imagination, for he presents the city's materiality and its social complex within a historical framework, highlighting its disposition for constant change. The spatial and the temporal components of Belfast's literary representations in the novels are closely connected, the one presupposing the other. "To place the city in space, [...] we must also take note of its position upon its historical timeline" (Alexander, "Somewhere in the Briny Say" 9). While the spaces described in the novels emphasise the urban characteristic of simultaneity, determining the city as a complex environment that reveals many faces at any one time, the temporal dimension of the narratives stresses the elements of flux and development. The city space changes continuously on the levels of both materiality as well as sociality. Michel Foucault identified the postmodern era as one of simultaneity, in which "we live inside a set of relations" (23). Patterson does this idea justice by portraying the city as a multifaceted landscape. Physically the image of the city as a labyrinth of interconnected areas shows Belfast as an amalgamation of heterogeneous sites. The urban environment comprises so many layers and aspects that it can never be fully represented in its entirety. Socially the city constitutes a container of micronarratives that form an interrelated network. However, this focus on the spatial and social does not suffice to describe Patterson's urban imagination, as the temporal element forms not only an integral part of the city, but also constitutes a characteristic of the novel. Patterson's narratives are based on a progression in which the story develops within time, and despite being presented not always strictly chronologically, the novel as a medium must contain a certain linearity already on a physical level. Even if the story does not, the reader's progress from page to page presupposes as much. Attempts to break with this linear order certainly exist in the genre of the literary novel, both with regard to content and typography or layout, but true

simultaneity can never be achieved as long as the reader is unable to read more than one text at a time.<sup>53</sup> Patterson's prose is conventional in this respect, and a clear sense of temporal progression always remains. Occasionally however, he deliberately deconstructs the chronology of events, and he repeatedly includes flashbacks within his narratives. In *The International* Danny takes "liberties in the telling" (TI 169) of his stories in such a way. Not only does he destabilise the narration by hinting towards the constructedness of the story and introducing an element of insecurity, but he also changes the sequence of events and arranges them to heighten suspense, as I have shown before. These chronological inconsistencies and narrative uncertainties certainly suggest a simultaneity and fluidity of meaning. However, the timeframe within which Danny takes his liberties remains clear. The story is firmly set on a Saturday in January in the year 1967. It begins in the morning and ends in the late evening, with the last guests leaving the Blue Bar. Additionally the period of time that has passed between the events themselves and Danny's account of them is clearly stated as 30 years. Likewise, the narrative of *Fat Lad* switches between perspectives and times, including stories and flashbacks told from the points of view of Ellen, Drew's father, Drew's grandmother and Anna, to name but a few. *Number 5* incorporates six homodiegetic narrators, while *That Which Was* again utilizes flashbacks. This heterogeneous narration and especially the introduction of more than one temporal setting do not upset the chronological order but positions the main story within a specific era and places it within a certain temporal context. The urban setting becomes clearly defined, as its present is compared to its past, and historical developments are highlighted. These developments happen on both a spatial and social level, emphasising the interconnectedness of the spatial, the social and the temporal. While Foucault's perspective stresses the importance of space in the postmodern world, arguing that the category has gained more importance than time in the postmodern age, Edward W. Soja's viewpoint includes three

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<sup>53</sup> Gerry Smyth even questions whether any literary form can express the simultaneous character of the city. "[H]ow to represent the physical and conceptual instability of the urban community in a form which, in terms of production, consumption and internal structure, supports the ideology of the stable, centred individual. Put simply: is it possible to represent the multiplicity of the city in a form which naturally favours a controlled, linear, developmental narrative?" ("The Right to the City" 17)

interconnected dimensions when he points towards a “growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical and the spatial, their inseparability and their interdependence” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 3). In Patterson’s novels these dimensions come together to form the imagination of Belfast, and the element of simultaneity joins forces with chronological development. Again, the writer combines antipodal ideas, when he describes the city as a place in which countless things happen at the same time, but also as a place that develops through time and that is deeply steeped in history. While connections between the spatial and the social have already become apparent within the previous two chapters, the dimensions appear most blatantly interwoven on a temporal level. Patterson lays much emphasis on describing the changes and developments of the city landscape and its society, and he documents these within the passage of time. Accordingly, the urban developments are described under these respective headers in the following chapter. I begin by delineating the changes in the material cityscape and move on to an analysis of a transforming society. A look at how Patterson sets urban history against individual life stories concludes the chapter and serves as a reminder that there exist not one but many versions of Belfast.

### **Material Changes**

The material cityscape of the Northern Irish capital is described as a transforming canvas in all four novels, but the texts employ different means to demonstrate this perpetual condition of flux. While *Number 5* spans a period of half a century and incorporates the physical changes the city undergoes within the five narratives that are arranged chronologically, *Fat Lad* includes frequent flashbacks into the past and the characters’ memories to compare the Belfast of the 1970s and 1980s with that of the 1990s and to chart the changes as Drew and his family perceive them. This technique can also be found in *The International*. Contrasting the year 1967 with the late 1990s, insertions of the older Danny take on the character of anticipations. By including negative references to Belfast’s future, *The International* paints a peaceful and undisturbed image of the city before the violent eruption of the sectarian conflict. *That Which Was* again evokes Belfast’s

past in memories and flashbacks. Set in the early years of the new millennium, it describes a city in the process of redefining itself. Old elements and aspects coexist with new architectural and urban achievements.

Rather than portraying a district well within the city boundaries, enveloped by the traditional trades and industries, *Number 5* focuses on the periphery, elevating it to the novel's central setting. While *The International* neglects a historically important event in favour of an assemblage of tragedies that are on a lesser scale but no less human, *Number 5* ignores the more familiar Belfast environment and opts for a neutral, almost bland setting that offers a space on which to inscribe the palimpsest of Belfast narratives. The novel delineates changes in the cityscape by describing the development of the estate. On the one hand, the property advertisements heading each new story chart the transformation of the house and thus the private sphere, highlighting changing living conditions and modern advancements that become everyday conveniences. On the other hand, the public space of and around the estate reflects the city's fate and economical as well as political situation in its continuously evolving landscape. In *Number 5* Belfast develops and expands from minor capital into modern city. The newly established estate marks the beginnings of this process. Stella describes the first journey to their new home, appalled by the estate's distance and disparity to the urban centre she has known:

We had such a walk to get here from the bus terminus, far beyond anything Harry or I knew of the city. We passed big houses with apple trees in the gardens, fountains, passed bungalows knocked together out of tin for victims of the Blitz. At one point we passed within earshot of a donkey, and though neither of us said so I think we would have turned back long before we reached the street if turning back hadn't meant spending a day more than was necessary in rented rooms. I say 'street', but maybe that is overdoing it. 'Clearing' would be closer. (N5 5)

Initially *Number 5* is built as part of new residential developments in a distinctly rural environment that has not yet been incorporated into the urban complex. At least Stella's imagination of Belfast does not reach as far as her new home, as she draws the city boundaries firmly around the space she and Harry have known. Her description conjures the impression of a remote area halfway between the past and

the future. While the ramshackle bungalows constitute lasting reminders of the hardships of World War II, the newly built houses already point towards a more prosperous future. However, at the moment they are not yet connected to Belfast's urbanity. As someone who has grown up within the industrial centre of the city, Stella is not used to apple trees and donkeys. These markers of country life carry distinct negative connotations for her. Stella further deepens the divide and once again establishes a hierarchy between the urban and the rural when she witnesses Ivy's parents visiting their daughter: "A grey-haired couple unpacked themselves from the doors either side and stood for a moment, looking around them like they had never seen so many houses in the one place. Or maybe they were just searching for a door number. Country people, I decided anyway, their clothes dark, their faces ruddy" (N5 21). Ivy, who is uninhibited by almost any prejudice and not nearly as self-conscious as Stella, and who welcomes newcomers indiscriminately with open arms and a tram of salt, at the time does not appear as perturbed by the isolated position of her home as her neighbour, but in retrospect she supports Stella's viewpoint when she describes the situation of the estate during the 1950s to Mel and Tony:

We couldn't imagine what it was like, she said, back when these houses were built. They didn't see it themselves at the time, but they were quite cut off, more like a village really than a suburb. She woke up one morning to find a herd of cows dandering up the middle of the street. People were coming out with brushes to stop them straying into the gardens, then shovelling up the pats for fertilizer. People burnt briquettes as well as coal on their fires, some people were still able to get actual turf. At night, she could walk off the end of her garden – there were no fences, because there was nothing behind the houses on that side to separate them from – and find herself in pitch darkness after twenty feet. "Stella was so pretty then," she said, as though everything that had gone before was scene-setting for her, "but she hadn't enough confidence in herself. She'd never enough confidence." (N5 265-6)

Ironically, Ivy remembers Stella most vividly within the temporal and spatial setting and thus involuntarily associates the young woman with the living conditions she repeatedly bemoans. It is important for Stella to be perceived as a member of the urban community, and Ivy's remark connects this need to Stella's lack of self-confidence and her increased consciousness for social norms and constructed hierarchies. Stella's strong antipathy towards the living conditions she



faces is a symptom of her struggle between self-fulfilment and the desire to fit into her prescribed role, and of course it serves the added purpose of describing the estate's humble and isolated beginnings. Ivy calls the neighbourhood during the 1950s a village rather than a suburb, and the missing connection to the city centre further illustrates this. Cars not yet being a common commodity, the inhabitants of the street are dependent on public transport to remain mobile, but the bus routes have not yet been extended to include the estate:

It was a one-mile walk to the bus terminus by public footpath, left out of the street along what we called the high road, as a consequence of, left again, the one joining it to the main road into town being signposted Low Road. At the opposite end of the street, however, next to McParland's, number 24, a wire fence had been tramped down and from here a rough track ran a diagonal three-quarters of a mile across fields to a patch of waste ground behind the main-road shops. If it had rained at all in the previous seven days, this path was quagmire. If there had been no rain, each step you took beat up a cloud of orange dust.

Artie kept promising that the Corporation would reroute the buses to within a hundred yards of us once the district was fully developed. (N5 15)

The lack of public transport and even complete roads enhances the feeling of isolation further and hampers the character's mobility, as they can leave the estate only on foot. This will change in the following decades and narratives, the increased mobility not only signifying the passage of time and technological development, but also a closer association with the city and an incorporation of the estate into the urban environment. The means of traversing Belfast have already been addressed in this thesis, because urban journeys and movement within the city support descriptions of the spatial setting and contribute to its imagination. The characters experience the urban space as they move through Belfast, and the way in which they do so influences their image of the city. Stella's feeling of isolation is doubled by her restricted mobility and lack of urban transport as well as the absence of an urban cityscape. The roads on which she can travel are not yet lined with the city's architecture but lead through empty space that will only gradually grow into a part of the city: "Some day the land between the high road, the low road and the main road would all have been filled in" (N5 16).

In Rodney's time the network of roads has become an urban environment, displaying also the negative aspects of city life, which unsettle the narrator. Rodney, who has grown up in the country, has moved to Belfast to take part in the city's cultural life. "We were market-townsfolk then, Margaret and I, born and bored. Oh, were we bored. There was not much theatre in the market town, not much chance to take in an orchestra, see more than the one new film a month" (N5 81). However, he is not prepared to engage with other facets of urbanity. The rough language and atmosphere of aggression prevailing in the streets frighten him. The impact of the Troubles and the economic decline<sup>54</sup> leave their marks on Belfast's cityscape and move the couple to leave the city: "Because there were no cinemas or theatres left to go to; because my wife had never really felt she belonged here; because we were not city people when all was said and done and even this was too much city for us; because this was not a place we would have wished to grow old in" (N5 113). Rodney and his wife have come to Belfast to enjoy the cultural advantages of the city but must revise their image to accommodate aspects of the city they had not anticipated. The eruption of sectarian violence reinforces these negative aspects further and changes Belfast into an environment the McGoverns cannot identify with.

While the couple struggles to come to terms with an atmosphere of aggression in Belfast, this does not affect Tan, who has grown up within this environment. The sectarian writings that have appeared on the city's material surfaces are nothing out of the ordinary for him. Unlike the McGoverns, who are initially lured to the city by its cultural promise but are ultimately intimidated by the unexpected faces of the cityscape, Tan feels at home in the streets. However, he too notices the changes of the urban landscape and comments on the development of the Low Road:

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<sup>54</sup> Linden Peach points towards the interdependence of economic decline and sectarian violence in *The Contemporary Irish novel*: "[T]he ongoing socio-economic development of Belfast in the late twentieth century has occurred alongside the conflict, but has, in all kinds of ways, been embroiled with it. Indeed, the emergent differences within sectarianism in Belfast are inseparable from the socio-economic changes within the city, especially the emergence of heavy industry, the demise of that age and its replacement in turn with a 'postindustrial' order" (35).

When I was a wee lad, the Low Road, where you turned on to it from our streets, was just a few big houses sitting in their massive gardens, the odd one with a brand-new wall around it, other houses built on the outside smaller and closer together. Then the road was widened and, a couple of years later, widened again and even the newer houses had lost ground. The older houses were mostly offices now and you got the feeling that someone somewhere had forgotten there were people living here at all. You had to really crane your neck to see to the tops of the lamp-posts. (N5 145)

While Tan does not regard the changing cityscape with much the same alarm and unease as Rodney and does not perceive this atmosphere of aggression, he nevertheless acknowledges a negative development of urbanisation. Living space is taken away from the city's inhabitants and turned into commercial land, changing the character of the urban environment.

By the time the Eliots move into Number 5 the streetscape has changed again, displaying influences of globalisation and first effects of the Good Friday Agreement. "It was tempting enough when doors were opened that up to now had been closed to you, and then there were just so many more – and more interesting – doors in this city all of a sudden. The Peace Dividend, as we'd all learned to call it" (N5 235). After 1998 economic opportunities abound in the city. Old businesses disappear and leave room for new developments that combine both global and local perspectives. "There was a new pizza and pasta place, *Bellissima!*, opened down on the main road, where Watt's the butcher's used to be" (N5 213). The traditional shop is replaced by a restaurant symbolising the influence of globalisation. Additionally, the generic-sounding name of the place suggests a restaurant chain that not only operates locally but on a wider basis. The peace process and economic stability have attracted international investors to Belfast and opened up the city to a global market and influence.<sup>55</sup> However, not all transformations display global character. Local influences are still able to shape the city just as much as global ones. O'Neill's timber yard stands as an

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<sup>55</sup> The development of a little plot of land charts the economic effects on the cityscape too, stressing the increasing influence of capitalism: in the 1950s Stella goes for walks in the surrounding area. "On the last bend before the farmhouse, a gate had been let in the hedge and beyond this a hundred yards lay a pond with ducks" (N5 43). 20 years later Tit'n Tan spend their free time at "the manky old pond next to the haunted farm" (129). Yet another two decades on the farmhouse has vanished completely, and the area has been turned into the Little Lake shopping centre (N5 248).

example for homemade development. Although O'Neill and his business never feature as central elements in the novel, they nevertheless reappear in most chapters, and the yard provides a relatively constant spatial marker. While Stella tries to get a job with O'Neill, Rodney mentions the yard being burnt down by one or other terror group. In Catriona's story O'Neill has died, and the business grounds are turned into a community arts centre to promote and support local cultural activity. The local initiative stands in contrast to the globalising influences symbolised by *Bellissima!* and paints the image of a city in which antipodal elements are allowed to exist alongside each other.

Local peculiarities are still observed in Mel's narrative, but by far not as strictly as he might have expected it. During the search for a restaurant that serves chips without vinegar, the city presents itself as an environment open to modernisation and new influences: "What surprised me wasn't so much that we found a place that didn't at only our fourth attempt, but that in this former chips-with-potatoes capital of the world none of the staff in the other restaurants appeared to consider a vinegar aversion to be in any way remarkable" (N5 270). This tongue-in-cheek comment might not refer to a major cultural development, but it nevertheless illustrates a change in cultural perception and openness even the new generation, to which Mel belongs, still needs to get used to. Although part of it, as his lifestyle and viewpoints show, the young man experiences the transition his city undergoes with a certain degree of excited amazement.

These transformations include changes in mobility that stand in stark contrast to Stella's isolated situation during the 1950s. While back then the estate was removed from the urban environment firstly by the distance to it and secondly by the lack of public or private transport, the estate is firmly established as part of the city during the time the Eliots live in Number 5. In the 1990s transport in Belfast heavily shapes the cityscape and inhabitants strain under the steadily increasing traffic volume, which manifests itself in the Eliots' problems to find a parking space in the estate. "The street was end to end cars" (N5 188). As a result the house is refitted to keep abreast with the transformations of the public space, and Steve and Catriona turn the front garden into their private car port. Mel and

Tony, being “a two-car, no vacuum household” (N5 253), make good use of the space.

Additionally, Mel’s narrative raises the importance of mobility to a new level, when he spots a “boat, a car, a train, a plane. [...] I wished I could have told Toni I had finally seen them” (N5 269). The four means of transportation, which can be found in any modern major city, establish Belfast firmly as part of the globalised world. Planes and trains not only connect the Northern Irish capital to other cities nationally and internationally,<sup>56</sup> they are also a sign of Belfast’s renewed image in the world. While Stella, Harry and other neighbours flee Belfast in the 1960s and 1970s, the means of transportation in the new millennium enable visitors to the city to experience a positive and welcoming urbanity. The boat Mel witnesses cruising the Lagan is a tourist boat, showing its passengers Belfast’s attractions. Thus the increased mobility both within and to the city reflects on the passage of time, on modern developments and the increasing prosperity of Belfast’s inhabitants. It also illustrates how the city is perceived from the outside, and the presence of tourists adding to the cityscape attests to Belfast having become a modern metropolis. *Number 5* charts the development of Belfast through fifty years. The provincial town continually grows, despite the negative effects of political unrest and economic decline, and it turns into a city that is part of a global and capitalist network, a point I will further discuss shortly.

Set at a turning point of its history, *Fat Lad* captures the beginnings of Belfast’s transformation into such a modern metropolis. The text conveys a clear sense of departure towards a new era, and Drew, having returned to his hometown after a long absence, is ideally positioned to comment on the changes. While other inhabitants, who have stayed in Belfast, might not perceive the urban development in such a drastic way because they had time to get used to it, the young man is confronted with a transformed city:

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander points towards a global interconnectedness of urbanity: “Belfast can also be seen to have participated in a broader experience of postmodern urbanity that stresses the connections, rather than disparities, that exist between it and other European and world cities” (“‘Somewhere in the Brainy Say’” 13).

The Belfast he left, the Belfast the Expats foreswore, was a dying city on its feet: cratered sites and hunger strikes; atrophied, self-abased. But the Belfast he had heard reports of this past while, the Belfast he had seen with his own eyes last month, was a city in the process of recasting itself entirely. The army had long since departed from the Grand Central Hotel, on whose levelled remains an even grander shopping complex was now nearing completion. Restaurants, bars and takeaways proliferated along the lately coined Golden Mile, running south from the refurbished Opera House, and new names had appeared in the shopping streets: Next, Body Shop, Tie Rack, Principles. And his own firm, of course, Bookstore. (FL 5)

*Fat Lad* condemns Belfast's past with a vigour that is absent from *Number 5*. While Rodney's adventures on a rundown main road by night amount to the most negative city description in the latter, the former paints an image of Belfast as a defeated and damaged victim of war.<sup>57</sup> After this site of devastation has been established, the city's resurrection and transformation into a thriving centre of life and commerce that reaches out towards the world appears even more magnificent. In this context Glenn Patterson stresses the influence of global capitalism. While *Number 5* includes *Bellissima!* into its narrative, which gives the impression of being an international chain, *Fat Lad* sports a whole host of well-known global brands that have discovered the business opportunities a peaceful Northern Irish capital can offer. *Number 5* stays generic in its names to reinforce the aspect of Belfast as an 'Everycity'. The fictitious restaurant chain symbolises abstract similarities between Belfast and other urban centres. In contrast, *Fat Lad* borrows heavily from real life, naming not only existing brands, but also including numerous Belfast landmarks and place names, as I have already pointed out. Both texts, however, establish very similar connections. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the heyday of the Troubles and the most brutal years of the conflict, Belfast suffers not only under sectarian violence and destruction but also under its economic situation. The graffito on the shutters along the main road in *Number 5* and the coarse voices of aggression are not a direct symbol of the Troubles (the male genitals not standing for any of the terror organisations or denominational groupings), but rather a sign of urban dilapidation as a result of economic

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<sup>57</sup> The narrative revises this initial image of Belfast in Drew's later recollections. In them the city hosts a number of communities that do not play by the rules of sectarian warfare. The Chapter "Social Spaces" addresses this aspect of urban society in *Fat Lad*.

problems. Similarly, the cratered and atrophied site described in *Fat Lad* lacks the basis for a healthy economy. The tables are turned with the beginning of the peace process. Catriona's 'Peace Dividend' finds expression in *Fat Lad* in the number of businesses along the 'Golden Mile' and a newly awakened global interest in the city centre. The army has been replaced by capitalist investors. The renamed airport from Aldergrove to Belfast International emphasises Belfast's urgent efforts to become part of a global network, with airplanes constituting an important means of transportation that enables this feat.<sup>58</sup> Other forms of mobility in *Fat Lad* include the bus, the car and the train, and while the text charts Drew's journeys through the city centre on foot in great detail, setting the scene by describing architectural details and developments, the modern conveniences of transportation that take Drew not only around the city, but also to Dublin and England, establish Belfast above all as a modern urban centre that is tied into a national and international network. Like Mel's narrative in *Number 5*, *Fat Lad* conveys

this new sense of Northern Ireland, this new feeling of its life and especially of its cityscapes as normal and modern, places which are no longer "apart" but rather a part of 1990s Europe. In this new Northern Ireland all the pros and cons of modern life can be found, from McDonald's restaurants to salubrious shopping arcades. (Pelaschiar, *Writing the North* 105)

The imagination of Belfast in the process of transformation is also hugely influenced by Drew's place of work. Bookstore combines Belfast's prosperous future with positive aspects of its past. It influences the cityscape but its makers are also careful to observe the existing urban character, and the building in which Bookstore is situated exemplifies the city's constant development.

The Belfast Bookstore was a slender, four-storeyed building on the south side of Castle Place, across the road and down from the new Head Post office and the

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<sup>58</sup> According to Gerry Smyth *Fat Lad* introduces "new perspectives, stressing the connections (as well as the differences) to the larger communities over the border and across the water, and indeed beyond in Europe" (*The Novel and the Nation* 130). Glenn Patterson himself states: "I wanted to bring into this novel some of the relationships between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain and further afield, so there's an image which runs through the novel of the plane, the trails that planes left like threads in the sky tying us together" ("I am a Northern Irish Novelist" 16-7).

purpose-built newsstand around whose parapet ran the endlessly repeated, digital refrain, *Belfast is buzzing*. For many years it had been Henderson's Gentleman's Outfitters, one of a block of five shops created in the 1930s by the partition of an Edwardian drapery emporium. Even now, more than half a century on, the Art-Nouveau façade of the upper storeys, curving in an elaborate bracket across the block, proclaimed the common lineage. But while time and changing proprietors had dealt its sibling increasingly solecistic lower floors (like the losing hand in a game of architectural Misfits), Henderson's with its tall narrow windows and ornamental glazing bars, had managed to retain down the years something of the original's turn-of-the-century splendour. (FL 12)

The slogan 'Belfast is buzzing' points towards a continuation of a thriving and industrious city. Other than in the text's first description of the urban environment, which established a clear opposition between the dying city Drew left behind and the growing centre of commerce, this quotation works towards linking Belfast's productive past with its promising future, and the splendour of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is preserved and continued in this new era of prosperity. The building exemplifies what Schlögel calls "das verwirrende Nebeneinander der Zeiten" (307) in the city. Different times and epochs become visible within the material cityscape and assemble into architecture of simultaneity.<sup>59</sup> The Bookstore building combines historical and contemporary characteristics of Belfast. This assimilation into the history of the city partly accounts for the great success of the Bookstore Company, which has opened branches all over the United Kingdom and Ireland and towards the end of the novel will even expand its influences on the European continent.<sup>60</sup> The architectural peculiarities of the buildings Bookstore moves into are always preserved, and the company does not impress its

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<sup>59</sup> Francesca Bovone stresses a similar point: "This idea of the past coexisting and mingling with the present permeates the whole novel in very different respects. It is introduced in the description of the Bookstore, which has taken the place of a shop that had been in Belfast since the 1930s, but has kept the beautiful mosaic pavement [...]. The idea Drew has for a commercial for his shop springs to mind while he is looking through a book of old photographs of the city. His slogan will rely on the feeling of trust the past can bring about, associating the recently opened shop, set in Castle Place, with the old Belfast Castle, the very symbol of the history of the city" (19). Bovone refers to the historical address Drew conceives of: "[a]s solid as symmetrical, as economical as it was extravagant in its expropriation of tradition: Bookstore, Castle Buildings, Castle Place, Belfast" (FL 67).

<sup>60</sup> In contrast to my description of the bookstore combining past and present, Linden Peach applies Baudrillard's theory to the appearance of the company, defining Bookstore as a "'rupta' which invents itself as modern and which, in the process, invents a tradition" (25). Whether invented or not, the point remains that Drew's place of work manages to utilise the past for its purposes and thus is able to incorporate itself not only into the contemporary cityscape but also the historical economical complex of Belfast.



own brand design but assimilates to local circumstances. Belfast does not pose any exceptions here, and Bookstore cleverly utilizes Henderson's former reputation for its purposes:

The Bookstore conversion had been faultlessly sympathetic. Design consultants were flown in from England to oversee it and an eminent art historian was hired, at great expense, to supervise the restoration of the magnificent mosaic floor. For it was the Bookstore house style that there was no such thing as a Bookstore House Style: no absolute prescriptions about fixtures and fittings, no externally imposed (and invariably inappropriate) colour schemes of maroon or bottle green. Context and harmony were the keynotes. Even the appearance of the name changed from shop to shop, so that the company itself had become, in a strange way, transparent and in place of anonymous branches of an impersonal chain store, the public saw only enticing shopfuls of books. Perhaps if there was a Bookstore trademark it was that: every shop, without exception, was packed to the rafters with books. Many people in many different towns took them for a local firm; some were even prepared to swear (market research had proved it) that their family had always bought books there, though the first shop was opened as recently as 1977 and the majority had appeared within the last five years. Advertising campaigns capitalised on the misconception. Each new shop was announced in the local press by a simple full-page photograph, and address, and, below that, two words: *Your Bookstore*. Business boomed. (FL 12-3)

The Bookstore's concept effortlessly combines the global with the local, opening up new opportunities for obliterating the contradictions between oppositions. While the company operates on an international level and spreads its branches much in the same way as businesses such as Next or Tie Rack, it nevertheless manages to uphold the illusion of being a local enterprise. Instead of selling its brand, the Bookstore focuses on adapting to local circumstances and blends in with the existing urban culture. The success of the business is based on its pretence of historicity, as it simulates a long-standing presence within the urban environment. In the case of Bookstore, change is presented as continuity. This in turn emphasises the historicity of the urban complex. Instead of a series of new beginnings that each introduce a new era, the city is characterised by a continued development that builds on the past. The spirit of the turn-of-the-century splendour is still tangible within the walls of the shop, and the city's past reverberates in the urban presence, creating a simultaneity of times. This temporal dimension constitutes an important element of Patterson's imagination of Belfast.

The past affects the urban imagination of the city's inhabitants, especially when they acknowledge urban transformations only reluctantly. These are influenced by aspirations and domestic dreams. Ellen's estate for example is still regarded as new by the neighbourhood over a decade after its construction:

Twelve years ago when the New Houses really were new they were separated from the estate where Drew's family lived by several acres of waterlogged meadow. There was only the one street originally, with six sets of sturdy semis on either side and beyond them, in a slight recess where the rudimentary dirt and gravel road bulbed to let cars turn, a thirteenth, unmatched, pair – the show houses – finished before the others where half begun. All through that spring their rich creamy stuccoed fronts lured people across the meadow from the old estate to wander through the wood-smelling interiors, pacing out the extra yardage in the kitchens and living rooms, opening and closing the doors of the second toilets, talking of all the things you could do with the additional attic space. To this day many on the old estate dreamt of *moving up there*, as they still termed it, even though the meadow was long ago built over, making the two areas, to all outward appearances, one; and even though the owners of the New Houses themselves now aspired to the Georgian-style development which was spreading away from them southwards into the countryside. (FL 21)

This development closely recalls the transformations the neighbourhood in *Number 5* undergoes, establishing change as an inherent urban characteristic. However, this is only falteringly accepted by the inhabitants, as the past status quo remains in their minds. "[A] city is not a place, but a process. And, though we can *see* this process (this city), we very rarely *look* at it" (Brett). Belfast's inhabitants in *Fat Lad* still recognise the boundary of the meadow in their imaginations and make a distinction between two architecturally homogeneous and merged residential areas. The New Houses keep their name even after more than a decade. Changes in the material cityscape do not develop congruently with changes in the urban mindscape, which is the mental image prevailing with the inhabitants. Characters such as Ellen and her husband live through the process of urban transformations and perceive them only gradually, until the past has assimilated into the present. Drew on the other hand experiences the changes as radical renewal. The fresh image of Belfast, as proclaimed in the very beginning of the novel, which is set in opposition to a dead city, is partly indebted to the young man's point of view as an outsider. He lacks the continuous perspective the long-term inhabitants possess and perceives the city images as temporally restricted

snapshots, with pictures of the past and present pitted against each other. However, having grown up in Belfast and possessing intricate knowledge of the urban environment and its transformations during the course of almost twenty years in the 1970s and 1980s, Drew regards Belfast from an insider's point of view as well. The double perspective expresses the young man's ambivalent relationship to his city of birth. His attempts to disassociate himself from Belfast are disrupted by his detailed knowledge and long-standing relationship with the city. At the beginning of the narrative Drew refuses to regard himself as a part of the urban complex and tries to maintain the outsider's perspective, but of course he fails:

Doubt crashed down in his mind with the force of a cartoon safe, pulverising the last eight years of his life, melding Drew-18 and Drew-26 together to teeter in a wide, Loony tune circle before finally pegging out on the spot where they started, and the awful thought occurred to him again that going away had been after all nothing more than the prelude to coming back. (FL 51)

Drew teeters between an insider's and an outsider's viewpoint, as different times blur together and confront him with an urban affiliation he seeks to renounce. In combining these antipodal perspectives the young man also paints an image of the city both within its historical context and at a given moment in time. This places him ideally to compare past versions of urbanity with the present and to emphasise to what an extent the city has changed during his absence of eight years. Belfast's complex character becomes apparent in Drew's double viewpoint, as Patterson "unfolds the story gradually through an episodic narrative that keeps looping back in time, shifting from one perspective to another" (Kennedy-Andrews, "The Novel and the Northern Troubles" 253). In reminiscences he evokes the city he has known as a youngster and contrasts it with contemporary Belfast, establishing the emerging images as a drastic departure and accentuating the striking alterations in a way Ellen and her husband would maybe not be able to. A run-down student dig of Drew's youth has transformed almost beyond recognition into a stylish bar. Discovering "Finney's nameplate gone and the old brick frontage replaced by a full-length frosted-glass window, he did not even break stride but marched straight up to the matching frosted-glass door as though

this was what he had expected all along” (FL 53). The city presents Drew with a myriad of new faces, and the young man learns to override memories of the past. Positive images gradually cover up his negative recollections that prevail at the beginning of the narrative, and as the story advances, Drew’s relationship with his hometown takes on a benevolent and optimistic character. This is reflected in his perception of a most blatantly desolate cityscape:

Directly below him was a twenty- or thirty-foot drop into what had once been May’s Market and was now, by all appearances, a car par, though a car park currently without cars: bare concrete relieved only by islands of weedy cement and, in the far corner, a bonfire of broken crates stoked by a solitary middle-aged warehouseman. A desolate scene, yet, in Drew’s current elevated mood, one that was touched with dignity by the glory of the evening. Everything about it spoke of a duty discharged, a use fulfilled, an order passing. Someone had told him (in all likelihood, Kay) that there was to be a concert hall built on this site. Already on the opposite side of the river the water’s edge had been transformed from industrial wilderness into a public walkway, paved in pinky brick: the inexorability of progress. (FL 217-8)

Belfast’s transformation is firmly underway, and the element of change remains an integral part of the urban complex. Drew’s continuous alternation between an outsider’s and insider’s viewpoint and his perception of the city’s past and present serve to illustrate this.

*The International* likewise emphasises the changes Belfast undergoes. While *Fat Lad* achieves a comparative picture by juxtaposing the contemporary image of the city with that of the past, Danny in *The International* includes glimpses of the future into his story and creates contrasting images of Belfast in these premonitions. He portrays a provincial place dominated by a very localised society, which nevertheless shows interest in global developments; it is a place that to Danny still feels more like a village than a city.<sup>61</sup> And yet, immanent change is clearly tangible on many levels. Politically as well as architecturally, major transformations that will transform the urban landscape announce themselves. The Troubles account for the most striking alterations, and, as Danny

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<sup>61</sup> In this sentiment he echoes Ivy’s image of the Belfast in the 1950s and 1960s, as depicted in *Number 5*.

puts it, “[f]or a good many years, in fact, Belfast disgraced itself” (TI 311). Comparing the Belfast in which the narrative is set to the city it will become afterwards, Danny paints two opposing pictures of urbanity; in the former the positive connotations dominate. The latter is invested with negative attributes, as the quotation above already shows. However, it is important to note how Danny regards the city Belfast becomes from the 1970s onwards. He sees it as a city veering from its righteous path, implying the immanent possibility of amelioration and repentance. The Troubles constitute a bad influence, an amoral phase of city life, which Belfast needs to leave behind. It can never return to the state of innocence it still retained on that January day of the year 1967 when the novel is set, but it can become a purged place in the future. Emphasising Belfast’s transformation, the text establishes change as an essential and inevitable characteristic of the city.

Similar to the characters in *Fat Lad*, Danny realises the effects of this continuous development and the first signs of change only in retrospect, and he too experiences the city within a temporal framework, depicting it by contrasting different versions: “I wish I could describe for you Belfast as it was then, before it was brought shaking, quaking and laying about it with batons and stones on to the world’s small screens, but I’m afraid I was not in the habit of noticing it much myself” (TI 61). However, the following observations immediately contextualise this play at youthful ignorance, as the narrator continues to highlight urban transformations as an eminent characteristic of the city.

I could give you the statistics you might find in any book – population, industry, number of churches and bars, or I could tell you that a week before the events I am describing I had woken in a room not a quarter of a mile from the City Hall to the sound of chickens fussing in the yard below. Only in recent years had the journey on foot from southern tip to northern fringe – from extreme east to far west – ceased to be a comfortable stroll, even now few people I knew missing their last bus home would have dreamed of taking a taxi. The B.U.M. was to change all that, of course. The B.U.M. was to give us four-lane, six-lane carriageways in the sky, primary distributor routes, ring roads – inner, outer, and intermediate – with flats where there used to be ratty houses, growth centres where now there were small outlying towns. We were going to be modern tomorrow, but for today the city was little different from the city I had been born into. (TI 61-2)

This short description hints not only at the multi-facetedness of the city and the impossibility to present it completely in a narrative, it also manages to include past, present and future representations of the city, portraying Belfast as steeped in its history. Danny portrays the development of the urban complex from a small town to a major city, or at least he portrays the city officials' ambitious aspirations for Belfast, for not the B.U.M. but the Troubles were to change all that. Instead of a motorway project that would ensure the urbanisation of Belfast, the violent conflict begins to take a hold of the city. Taxis do not become obligatory because of Belfast's growing size but because of the increasing violence on the city's streets. The Belfast Danny portrays will soon be gone, only to be conjured again in the imagination and images. "I have other photographs which Ingrid gave me, museum pieces now, the sort of things the rebuilt bars of Belfast would kill to have on their retro walls. The city in these photographs is another place entirely, the mere passage of years cannot account for the sense of rupture" (TI 307). After the initiation of the peace process, the city aims at regaining some of its previous character and tries to rid itself from the influence of the conflict, emulating the lost atmosphere of pre-Troubles Belfast. However, it cannot go back in time, as the rupture is too great to mend. Irrevocable changes in the cityscape attest to that: "Malvern Street is altered beyond all recognition. You'd have to ask the people living there whether it has changed for the better" (TI 311). In *The International*, the street in which Peter Ward, was murdered, specifically locates the violence and destruction brought about by the conflict, and its transformation can be seen as exemplary for Belfast as a city.

Although Danny does not spell out a negative change, his previous comments on the Troubles establish this time as one of the worst in city history. In contrast to that bleak period, Belfast's past is depicted in positive terms. As so often, Glenn Patterson stresses the changes that concern the ordinary inhabitants of the city, focusing his narrative on their lives. While Danny usually concentrates on individual stories and highlights the heterogeneous character of Belfast's society, he generalises the story of his parents in order to emphasise the unifying elements the city's inhabitants experience and to exemplify the history of the urban society after World War II:

I knew that Things Had Been Hard when my parents were first married, though this complaint seemed so general to people of their age that it added little to my understanding: in the thirties they had gone without to feed their children, in the Blitz they had sheltered under the kitchen table while landmines exploded at the top of the street... You know how it goes. They lived in the usual run of rented rooms and kitchen houses, collecting friends and porcelain cats in more or less equal measure, and finally moved, as many people of their generation were then moving in the post-war years, to a brand-new Corporation estate on the outskirts of the city, where in the front bedroom of their two bedroom maisonette I was born, too suddenly for medical assistance, nine months to the day after they received their keys. (TI 41)

Belfast's post-war society experiences a gradual amelioration of the living conditions. While economic problems still exist in the 1960s – “Belfast as ever was light a few thousand [jobs]” (TI 34) – the overall situation of its inhabitants nevertheless slowly improves along with the standards of the time. Belfast may not be a frontrunner, but it competes with other urban centres, striving for a modern environment. The concept of the Belfast Urban Motorway and the problems in its realization constitute the best example of this. On the one hand, the motorway stands for ambitious planning in urban development. Not only would it change the cityscape dramatically, but it would also provide the basis for a modern means of transportation. This revolutionary system for increased mobility would establish Belfast as a modern city, and even though it is still in the planning stage, the project already symbolises the relative prosperity of the city. On the other hand, however, Danny's tongue-in-cheek references to the motorway and its apparent unfeasibility reconstitute Belfast as a city ruled by realistic averageness. Danny ridicules his hometown in a good-natured way and shows how its ambitions exceed its actual possibilities. “That's right, Belfast – Urban – Motorway: B.U.M. I suppose I had been dimly aware of the B.U.M. for almost as long as I had been aware of Belfast itself” (TI 33). While plans for its construction have existed for a very long time, its realisation has never been achieved, turning the project into the topic of many jokes among Belfast's inhabitants. This is helped by the ambiguous choice of acronym:

They really did call it the B.U.M. in City Hall, by the way. They can't all have been stupid, so perhaps the abbreviation was meant to make the idea less

intimidating, in a Frankie Howerd, *Up Pompeii* sort of way, though even then someone might have stopped to wonder what message it sent to the people whose houses were currently mouldering along the road's intended route. If they had any doubts before, there was no escaping now the fact that they were stranded up the arse-end of nowhere. (TI 34)

Danny portrays the city planners' vision of the motorway as out of proportion with regard to the housing problems Belfast still experiences. He subtly criticises the proceedings at City Hall, which focus on prestigious urban projects and neglect more pressing but decidedly less glamorous matters. In *The International* the official urban imagination differs considerable from that of the city's inhabitants, proving once more that Belfast is perceived subjectively. This official version of the city is portrayed as artificially constructed and imposed and must therefore always remain second to the naturally evolving complex the inhabitants form. With their influence multiple versions come together to form a shifting and unstable urban complex. The need for change and the transformational character of the city is emphasised not only in descriptions of Belfast's past and present, but also in visions of the future.

*That Which Was* achieves a juxtaposition of the past and present in the description of architectural changes. Set in the midsummer of 2000, the text features the most contemporary setting of all novels and accordingly includes more recent urban transformations within its narrative. Similar to the descriptions of the cityscape in *Fat Lad*, *That Which Was* portrays Belfast as a rapidly growing and transforming city, laying emphasis on economic progress and the effects it has on urban architecture. However, newly arising business opportunities do not feature as strongly in the minister's narrative. Instead the focus lies on more domestic and private changes, as Ken Avery travels across Belfast to make a number of house calls. Remarkably, one of his first visits follows up on images of the houses Danny in *The International* describes as 'mouldering' on the route of the B.U.M.:

The house was second last in a row awaiting demolition. From the best part of an acre round about there were not two bricks left standing one on top of the other. Footpaths ran like failed irrigation channels through the wasteland of fallen streets. Avery sometimes imagined that it had only just sunk in in these neighbourhoods that the industries on which they depended, on which they prided themselves were



now ancient history and that the houses had simply buckled under the weight of dejection.

On another edge of this desert, behind fences mounted with CCTV cameras and hoardings highlighting proximity to the city centre, new low-density housing was beginning to grow. Who knew? When it was all finished some, maybe most, of the former residents might have moved back in. Meanwhile at any one time Avery was ministering-by-motor to several families temporarily relocated to housing estates and B-and-Bs across the east of the city. (TWW 35-6)

Like previous quotations, this passage combines past, present and future, emphasising transformations within a temporal framework. Out-of-date housing is gradually replaced by contemporary accommodation, and the process turns the city space into a site of destruction. Avery finds an almost war-like zone, caught at a tangible moment of change. The houses awaiting demolition remain markers of the disappearing city space, while the rubble depicts the present climate of transformation. The newly arising housing ‘on the other edge of the desert’ finally points towards the future cityscape. For the inhabitants the process denotes a radical experience, as they are uprooted from their familiar environment. By the time they are allowed back, the space will be unrecognisable. This description differs considerably from others in Patterson’s texts. Rather than portraying change as a gradual process sneaking up on the city’s inhabitants, *That Which Was* presents it as a drastic intervention in people’s lives. However, in imputing a delayed process of realisation to the neighbourhood, reminiscent of the effect the estate’s changes had on Ellen and her husband in *Fat Lad*, the text immediately relativizes this impression and shows the pervasive influence of history.

The industrial traditions of Belfast are represented as deeply inscribed onto the city’s inhabitants, constituting existential elements of identity. Bereft of these elements, the old perceptions of the city must crumble and leave behind a site of demolition. While the majority of inhabitants learns to gradually let go of traditional urban properties, such as the historical Belfast industries of ship-building and textile production, and to look towards new elements of identification, the text in this instance portrays a strong social and material connection to the old identity-sustaining features, highlighting the essential transformations Belfast undergoes. As the process of renewal is contracted to the collapse of a house, its impact on both the material and social cityscape becomes

more noticeable and the change becomes more immediate. A further visit to the same site a couple of months later reveals the speed of progress:

When exactly the fences had come down, Avery didn't know, though it couldn't have been that long ago for there was still cement dust on the road, which bounded, like sight regained, all the way to the next main road and its procession of city-bound cars, nose to tail in the narrow band of morning sunlight. On either side of the street new houses stood, neat and blank, and double glazed; waiting. The terraces ended in a patch of ground heaped with rubble. Avery remembered coming at this patch from the other side when the street had still been two-way and the heap of rubble had still been a row of houses. (TWW 212)

The last houses awaiting demolition have been turned into dust, while the construction of contemporary accommodation has progressed considerably. The new buildings, however, are not yet invested with life, instead they stand waiting 'neat and blank' for someone to give them meaning. At the same time, the amount of traffic that already fills the streets and firmly places the site within the boundaries of the urban environment works together with the modern conveniences such as double-glazing to impress the newness and modernity of the buildings, and the morning sunlight establishes a site of beginning.

The new houses change the eastern part of Belfast, following the city centre that already boasts of advanced developments, striving for a vibrant and modern urbanity, in which past influences are still pervasive:

Before Belfast rediscovered its river and, alongside it, the pleasures of inner-city apartment dwelling (or at least of dwelling in inner-city apartments were damp, crap workmanship and vandalism did not come fitted as standard), the roads radiating southwards from the university had offered those of its citizens who could afford it the closest approximation to the modern urban-village experience. Even now when the hunger for hi-spec flats was so great developers were beginning to eyeball city-centre car-parks, the two- and three-bedroom Victorian terraces off the Stranmillis and Lisburn Roads changed hands for the price of a profitable farm west of the Bann, of an entire row east of the Lagan, and located their owners within a stone's throw of some of the city's best all-day-and-nightlife.

Or, in the case of the house that Avery was currently watching from the window-seat of a coffee place on the Stranmillis Road, within spitting distance.

The Place, the place was called, a rival back formation from the *ur*-Belfast café-diner the Other Place, of which (so successful was the original) there were now several around this part of the city. The Place was fitted out entirely in unadorned MDF and smelt strongly of something Avery finally worked out, as the umpteenth glass of frothing tea wafted past him, was cardamom. (TWW 73)

While the streets in East Belfast remain unnamed, the Stranmillis and the Lisburn Road anchor the description clearly in the city centre and the nearby areas next to Queen's University and the Botanic Garden. The text delineates Belfast's transformation by comparing past and present cityscapes and social stratification, establishing the city-centre development as an extension of the urban atmosphere, as it has prevailed in the southern part of town. The urban village feeling permeating the new buildings and remade city districts is enriched by new businesses emulating already existing models. The Place, as one of many copies of an establishment clearly associated with the urban lifestyle of Belfast, exemplifies the proliferation of such an atmosphere.

Avery's own home stands in contrast to both this positive and urban image of the city centre and the abrupt departure from traditional and obsolete living concepts in parts of the eastern districts. Resembling more a mansion than a house, the building has survived many changes within the area and remains a sign of past splendour, despite a different environment and usage: "With its rustic flourishes and vestigial outhouses, it was still referred to by some locally as Townsend Grange from the days when the city's outward reach was several miles shorter. Now, its tall hedge was broken on one side by the palings of an electricity substation, and on the other by the goods yards of a Tesco Metro" (TWW 15). The expansion of the city and the view towards "a block of seventies maisonettes" (TWW 15) have turned the name of the building most inaccurate, but in local recollection the former character of the neighbourhood as the border area to the countryside remains, establishing a place steeped in history.

*That Which Was* highlights Belfast as a shifting urban space by juxtaposing past and present versions of the city. The change becomes immediate because specific examples show its progress and the drastic effects it has on the inhabitants is addressed. All four novels make use of architectural specifics to portray the urban development. Schemes of modernisation influence the modes of transport within the city and connect it to an international network.

## Social Changes

Nonphysical aspects of urban transformation become apparent in the description of social changes. While *Number 5* and *Fat Lad* include references that hint towards a transformation of society over a longer period of time, such as changing gender roles in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *That Which Was* and *The International* portray the people's attitude towards the Troubles and the way they deal with its consequences. Both developments contribute to the image of the city as a complex whose only constant is change and whose character is decisively shaped by the subjects peopling it.

*The International* depicts Belfast society during a process of reformation. The conflict has not broken out yet, but people slowly begin to worry about the political development. Danny's frequent foreshadowing of the dark times to come and the implications of the temporal setting amplify this effect and indicate an imminent turn to the worse regarding the relationship between Catholic and Protestant activists. On the one hand Danny still makes light of the political situation and portrays radical members of society as exceptional and mentally abnormal. The Evangelical Protestant Society are 'fruitcakes', Ian Paisley is a 'sick joke' and the IRA an extremist minority, too small to splinter. In retrospect Danny's attitude changes and his tone becomes considerably more serious. While he speaks of minorities and small groupings that form in the 1960s, emphasising individual activity, he generalises at a later stage in the novel. 30 years on he chooses an active wording to denote the city's role: "Belfast disgraced itself" (TII 311). It is no longer single groupings and terrorist organisations that disgrace the city, but the whole urban environment becomes actively involved in the Troubles at this moment. One way of interpreting this statement, which is very uncharacteristic for Danny, is that neutrality for the population is no longer possible. The conflict has taken on such dimensions that it can affect anybody at any time, as indeed the last pages of *The International* show. Hugh dies

driving past an army foot patrol on the dark road of Boho. Accidental discharge, army headquarters said and that, as it so often was with the army, was that. Liam Strong was bereft, and then a few months later was dead himself. He and Rita both,

killed breaking the habit of a married lifetime when a satchel full of gelinite was thrown into the restaurant they had gone to for dinner one Saturday evening in 1972. That same year, Oscar had a bag put over his head in an entry behind a drinking club and was shot for informing. Oscar [who is deaf]. Jamesie lost almost the entire male line of his family to Loyalist assassins and Republican feuds. His hair turned white. (Women like the distinguished look, he tells me.) My own brother was shot in the thigh in mistake for another man and bled to death. Oh, it just goes on and on, I shouldn't get started. (TI 309-10)

People die during the Troubles, and it does not make any difference whether they have taken an active part in the conflict or not. Humour no longer is an appropriate register to refer to the sectarian civil war. The city has become dangerous and unpredictable, and "the live circuit began to sound like a sick joke in Belfast" (TI 295).<sup>62</sup> The death of Peter Wards constitutes a drastic indicator of a changing time, which is reflected in the careful scepticism people begin to treat each other with. The International Hotel where "we're none of us anything" (TI 256) still constitutes a safe haven from sectarian prejudice, but outside the walls of the building Danny perceives a strained atmosphere of mistrust. Fitz, a businessman from Dublin who wants to invest on the Protestant Shankill Road, feels its effects when his plans do not come to fruition because of his Irish background, and despite his protests: "He was a Protestant himself, after all. Admittedly, said Clive, but a southern one. What about Sir Edward Carson, Fitz asked: founding father of Northern Ireland and Dublin born and bred? Clive regretted that that would make no difference. To the voters on the Shankill Road, Fitz would be a southerner regardless" (TI 171). The atmosphere of increasing scepticism towards members of the other denomination, or, in Fitz's case, people who come from a cultural background defined as the Other, highlights the potential for change within the urban society. Whether for better or for worse,

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<sup>62</sup> Rodney in *Number 5* expresses a very similar sentiment, when he states of the 1970s "These were days when anything, you felt, could happen to anybody in this city. Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, bearded shop-owning man... me" (N5 101). In this statement he contradicts Richard Kirkland's claim, that the middle class was not affected by the Troubles. "The 'Troubles' scarcely figure. Not in art, not in life. The neutral middle class can afford to be aloof. The North's well-to-do have managed to come through the conflict almost completely unscathed: they live in pleasant residential suburbs that see no rioting; they are not arrested or raided; they suffer no casualties" (*Identity Parades* 5). Rodney's fear and Hideg's murder indicate differently, however, and show that within Patterson's texts the atmosphere of danger permeates all strata of society.

social perceptions transform. Political arguments infest the general attitude and insecurity towards the other affects the urban atmosphere.

While in *The International* the conflict gradually becomes more insistent, as Danny's references to politically extremist groups and pervasive preconceptions show, the narrative of *That Which Was* is situated at the other end of the Troubles. However, prejudices similar to the ones that develop within the minds of some Belfast inhabitants in *The International* still exist in *That Which Was*, a story set more than 30 years after 1967. Like Danny, Ken Avery continuously contests these attitudes. Both novels portray social development and the formation of popular presumptions as a heterogeneous process that happens gradually, rubbing against established positions and norms. Changing attitudes do not appear overnight but slowly take a hold. In order to capture the nature of this transformation, Patterson pits past events against present tendencies. Furthermore he includes divergent viewpoints within his narrative, establishing an amalgamation of perspectives that jostle against each other, sometimes even within a single person. Deeply rooted binary oppositions prevail despite efforts to establish equality and eradicate bigotry in the Northern Irish capital. The character of Darryl's mother serves as a prime example. After her son has been hurt during the cross-communal football tournament organised by Avery, her consternation illustrates an awareness of obsolete concepts paired with lingering prejudices:

Look at Derry, she said. Them ones only have to ask and they get.

As with *I have nothing against my kids playing with Catholics, but...* this was not a novel sentence in Protestant East Belfast. What it meant was that after almost three decades of campaigning a new judicial inquiry had opened earlier that year into the killing in Derry of thirteen civilians in January 1972: Bloody Sunday. (TWW 91-2)

The binary oppositions still exist within the mind of this woman and many of her neighbours, the expression 'them' constituting the other against whom their own identity is formed, and which still resounds in the more striking statement that follows. The narrator's ironic comment, however, immediately contextualises the attitude. 30 years of campaigning hardly qualify as a simple plea for an inquiry,

especially since Bloody Sunday represents a crucial incident during the Troubles which is often quoted as a reason for the continued violence. For the mother the question of guilt seems clear: “So it’s all right, is it, for them ones to bomb and shoot us for thirty years, but not for anyone to do a thing back?” (TWW 92) The narrative pits deliberations of humanity and morality against this black and white thinking, in order to establish multiple positions that influence the social attitude. When Avery’s friend Des meets a former activist of the Troubles in the very building he bombed, the complexity of the situation makes it difficult for him to take a clear position towards the man’s life. His guilt and motivation become contested in the context of the decade-long conflict, and the man’s advancement in jail stumps the Catholic priest. During a wedding Des merely comments on the material transformation of the building and gets to hear the bomber’s life story:

Some changes here all the same, he said, and the best man said, Talk to the brother here.

Why? said Des, leaning out. Did you do the building work?

The brother looked the other way.

No, said the best man, it was him that bombed it. Did five years, didn’t you, our kid?

Five and a half, the brother said. [...]

And the thing about it is, said Des to Avery, prison had been the making of the fella. GCSEs, A levels, Open University. I’m looking at him wondering is this guy a bad example or a good example or a bad one reformed. It’s a test of vocabulary half the time as much as morality. You never know to look at anybody the things they might have done. (TWW 69)

Rather than the clear-cut perception the mother pertains, the reality reveals itself to be much more complex. Concepts such as guilt, morality or justice cannot be clearly defined. Was the education the man received in prison justified? Was it counterproductive to the punishment he was supposed to receive or a sign of the efficiency of the sanction? Des is not able to answer these questions clearly, because they pose complex puzzles that require a constant rebalancing of their parts. In the same vein, Avery cannot be sure of his own moral standards when confronted with dangerous situations that might require him to act. Rather than limiting violence to incidents between the two opposing groups of Protestants and Catholics, *That Which Was* describes feuds within supposedly functioning neighbourhoods. People are physically attacked for so-called crimes against the

community or ‘anti-social’ behaviour. In fact, since the peace agreement is largely observed within the sectarian conflict in the year 2000, these punishment beatings make up for most of the violence portrayed in *That Which Was*. While the narrative ridicules the incidents in so far as it deprives them of any justification, as I have shown in the chapter “Social Spaces”, it also emphasises the deadly seriousness with which they are fought out. In light of these events, Avery remembers past feuds between loyalist groupings and the resultant pleas for help from the victims, and he wonders if he could live up to his own moral beliefs:

Avery had a vivid memory of the fear in the voices from the blacked-out faces on the television news, an equally clear recollection of the muted response to the priest’s pleas for community support. He tried to imagine taking one of these young fellas into his own house and hoped if ever he was faced with it he would have the strength to overcome the sudden doubt the attempt gave rise to. (TWW 102)

Abstract decisions that appear clear-cut become uncertain and fraught with imponderability, because different perspectives and deliberations collide and the situations threaten to become concrete. Avery’s decisions in 2001 constitute an intricate issue, and *That Which Was* establishes the Troubles as a multidimensional complex whose impact is unpredictable and interminable. Past events influence present-day outlooks, and in retrospect the topic of the Troubles has gained a complexity of meaning with which even seasoned veterans such as Des and Avery grapple. To navigate the multiple repercussions on Belfast society, the Northern Irish churches organise opportunities for discussion: “For the past two years the prisons of Northern Ireland had been emptying of paramilitary prisoners. [...] For the past two years Avery, like most members of the clergy, had been attending conferences on issues arising from this early release scheme” (TWW 12). *That Which Was* presents a city still influenced by a highly contested past. Questions of good and bad, morality and justice remain unanswered and, what is more, are described as unanswerable. Larry’s story and Avery’s inability to find out the truth constitutes the most important example of this. Belfast history is not set in stone but subject to alteration, speculation and conflicting viewpoints. Remembering the events during the Troubles always also requires a process of



constant evaluation, and so the city once more constitutes a space that is defined by shifting meanings.

*Fat Lad* and *Number 5* also portray an urbanity that changes with its social perceptions. In these texts, gender roles change and lose some of their binary character. Whereas social norms were clearly defined for men and women in the past, many of these rules disappear in the contemporary narratives, transgressing formerly irrevocable boundaries. In the stories that are set in or just before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, female characters detach themselves from domestic environments and actively influence the cityscape, not only on a domestic and personal level but also publicly. Catriona and Tony in *Number 5* but also Kay and Anna in *Fat Lad* constitute prime examples of this tendency. In turn, men enter the domestic sphere and take over tasks that were formerly associated with women.

Spanning over 50 years, the narrative of *Number 5* illustrates this development particularly well. In the 1950s running the household is invariably Stella's domain: "I would go from room to room, with my vacuum and my duster and my tin of polish, and feel like a chief engineer, alert to every speck of dirt that might foul up the vessel's smooth running" (N5 18). At the turn of the century, however, Mel shares domestic responsibilities with Tony. In contrast to Rodney, who is active in the house but takes over technically demanding tasks such as maintaining the newly installed central heating, or the men during the 1970s who only buy very specific goods – "Many of them carried blue and white bags of soda and potato bread. No other kind of shopping. There was nothing sissy about a fry-up" (N5 139) – Mel unquestioningly sweeps the kitchen, prepares dinner and goes grocery shopping. Tony on the other hand carries out heavy manual work when she redecorates the house, excavating walls (and Rodney's map of the world) and adding a patio to the back yard. Additionally she, like Catriona, who holds a job at the community arts centre and thus directly contributes to neighbourhood life, constitutes an active member of society within the public sphere. Together with Rory she organises the balaclava-grams and later on starts the cleaning business with Mel, the two of them appearing as equal partners in all professional and domestic matters. At least in the microcosm of the Butler / Baker

household the gender differences formerly prevalent in Belfast society are eradicated, and even their names testify to this. Tony and Mel denote no gender specification and are both male and female names. The binary character of gender dissolves in the second last chapter of *Number 5*. Within the urban complex rigid definitions are no longer applicable. The transformation of social norms highlights the openness to change and the transforming character of Belfast that develops as part of a global network that is increasingly aware of the gender debate, and within an environment, in which the women continuously push into the public sphere.

In *Fat Lad* this development is even more pronounced, as the female characters within the text take on a central and “symbolic role in the narrative” (Kirkland, *Identity Parades* 115) and embody different types of women, representing facets of Belfast’s character. While Ellen fulfils the traditional role of a housewife who holds the family together, Kay stands for a new and more independent lifestyle. Self-determined, confident and proud, she claims her rights and her space. Throughout her relationship with Drew, she remains in control of the level of intimacy between them. Her half-sister on the other hand distinguishes herself through aloofness and reserve. Where Kay is open to new acquaintances, Anna holds back and remains withdrawn. Her personal history merges with Belfast’s dark past, and accordingly her relationship with the city is infused with loathing and informed by the experience of human loss. The female characters in *Fat Lad* fulfil varying gender roles to form a heterogeneous image of Belfast. Their lives and characters represent the different faces of the Northern Irish capital and depict the urban environment as diverse and multi-faceted. Belfast exposes not one but many faces that are influenced by changing life stories and gender roles. Kay represents a Belfast that has newly invented itself, and her job and personal life reflect this:

Kay, it turned out, ran a design company – part of the prestige Laganside development – somewhere around the docks. Very small, she said, like her (and it was true, she couldn’t have been more than five feet one or two). But, unlike her, still growing. She owned a flat in one of the new town houses just round the corner

from *jazzbo brown's* and often came in here for a drink if she'd been working late. (FL 56)

Everything about Kay speaks of renewal and contemporariness. Her company and its location represent the creative potential of urbanity. The Liganside along the river has turned from a rundown and obsolete industrial area into a promising site for investors and businesses. Her flat is part of a new development to infuse the city centre with life and to make it attractive to both the public and private sphere. The presence of *jazzbo brown's*, the stylish and newly renovated bar which Drew still remembers as Finney's, constitutes a marker of this potential. The development has not reached its climax yet either. Kay's growing business insinuates that the transformation has only just begun and that Belfast will continue to change. The young woman in *Fat Lad* acts as a catalyst that enables Drew to push the images of Belfast during his youth towards the back of his mind and to allow the new picture of the city to dominate his imagination. Kay's and the city's charms persuade him to get involved with this contemporary Belfast. The atmosphere of *jazzbo brown's*, the place in which Drew's affair begins, signifies the first signs of an altered image of the city and a dominance of the present over the past. "Drew now located the trilling piano he had heard from outside, completing a trio with double-bass and drums in a distant, atmospherically cramped corner of the room – where the broom cupboard-toilet used to be, though even as he sat there the memory of that was fading" (FL 54). Recollections of the city he left grow fainter as Drew is slowly won over by its new character. After a trip down south, Drew realizes that even Dublin cannot compete with the irresistible connection of Kay and Belfast showing itself at its best: "Outside the pub, Kay offered him her free arm with queenly disdain. The sun drifted deeper into the fabulous cloudbank. Belfast blushed at its own comeliness. Dublin paled further" (FL 218).

While Kay shows the protagonist Belfast's future, her sister Anna reminds him of its past. The violence of the Troubles forms her life story crucially, and accordingly she entertains an uneasy relationship to Belfast, blaming the city for the loss of her lover. Anna's narrative of a disturbed past, of stereotypical

differentiations,<sup>63</sup> sectarian violence and freak accidents stands in stark contrast to Kay's focus on the future. The fact that Drew sleeps with both women insinuates his final acceptance of both the negative and positive sides of the city and Belfast's history.

Anna reveals her past towards the end of the novel. Falling in love with "a skinny Mod" (FL 261) at the age of sixteen, a number of Northern Irish clichés reverberate in her story. "Conor, you called him – Con for short – and, as if that wasn't enough of a giveaway, he told her he came from *the top of the Grosvenor Road*. i. e., he might as well have come right out and said it, Up The Falls. She was from across the river, the Woodstock Road (East meets West, the Belfast classic) [...]" (FL 261).<sup>64</sup> The sheltered Protestant girl runs off with the Catholic working-class lad. To save their love, they break with their families. Anna endures physical violence: "The girls tied her to a bus stop, egged on by their boyfriends and their boyfriends' friends [...]. They punched her and kicked her and spat on her. Called her a Taig-loving whore, chalked on the footpath at her feet: FREE RIDE" (FL 262-3). Conor gets threats to his life: "[A] man he didn't know from Adam stopped him in the street close to his house and pressed something cold into his hand. A live bullet. It wasn't meant as a souvenir" (FL 263). Despite the imminent danger they are in, the couple stays in the city, seeking out those areas of Belfast that are not firmly in one sectarian hand or another:

These were the days after internment, the city was streamlining its divisions, ironing out the bumps. Or whatever else it took to get rid of them.

They looked for a place in amongst the other bumps and oddments in the streets around the university and found a flat in a forbidding-looking Victorian terrace, from which, if they stood on the bathroom sink, they could see down into the Botanic Gardens where they had used to meet.

*Ulster '71, come and join in the fun.* (FL 263-4)

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<sup>63</sup> Patrick Walsh scathingly criticises the character as "'mystical' in a novel which, in its saner and more characteristic moments, would sneer healthily at such a concept. That well-flogged, and very dead horse, 'love across the sectarian divide', makes a tired, improbable development, and unconvincing appearance" (44).

<sup>64</sup> As he does often in *Fat Lad*, Patterson resorts to street names to transport very specific implications of the urban environment. Only knowledge of the cityscape reveals Grosvenor Road coming off the Falls Road.

Even during its darkest and most disturbed period the city still retains little pockets of sanity and neutrality that Anna and Conor can occupy. Despite people all around them being killed and mutilated, they stay in their hometown, carrying their love like an umbrella of safety, until ten years later Conor is crushed to death by the wheel of a saracen that comes loose, while on his way to buy cigarettes. Public and private histories intersect at that moment of the story when Drew recognizes the course of events from a TV report he saw years ago, sitting in Finney's. For Anna the accident carries dramatic significance and she experiences private loss, which is reflected in the intimate nature of her memories:

It was a Sunday, after half-eleven. We'd only two cigarettes left. I said that would do us till the morning, but he hated the thought of running out. He wouldn't be five minutes. He was just after a bath, his hair was still damp. I didn't say you'll catch your death, or anything like that. I had no premonition. He just took the keys and left. Kissed my ear, I think. I was reading a library book at the time, I didn't look up. (FL 267)

For Drew, then a teenager about to leave for university, Conor's death constitutes one incident of many, and it stands as another evidence of an incongruous and utterly futile sectarian war. "[T]he absurdity of random death is pushed to its extreme" (Pelaschiar, *Writing the North* 114) in Drew's recognition. In the end he even jokes about the accident, disrespecting the loss of life, desensitised by its normality. In this incident Patterson pits private history against public history, shifting the focus from the general to the particular and giving a hitherto anonymous and thus marginal victim of the Troubles not only a name and a story, but also a bereaved lover. Once again, he highlights the network of people that make up the city and bestows the social web with depth by steeping it in history.

Drew's and Anna's sexual intimacy finally brings the two experiences together, reconciles the protagonist with the history of the city and shows him that "the only way to move on is to acknowledge, understand, remember and accept the past" (Bovone 16). Kay has helped him see Belfast's future potential, and Anna has given him the peace of mind to incorporate the city's past into a new image. The description of their sexual encounter speaks not only of a union of two people, but also of that of time and space:

Vast movements of peoples were communicated in the silence of a single kiss. Borders were crossed, identities blurred. Land masses rose and fell with their bodies.

Not surprisingly, their lovemaking was long and intricate and when it was over they felt the moment ebb away into the future. (FL 273)

The female characters in *Fat Lad* personify different facets of Belfast. Additionally, the transformation of the role of women throughout time becomes apparent in the life stories of Drew's mother, aunt and grandmother, and their juxtaposition to Kay's and Anna's lives. While the Morris sisters represent a modern and independent generation of self-determined women, the female members of Drew's family have experienced a very different life, focusing on family and children. Granny Linden met her future husband very early on: "Greta was twenty when she married him and still twenty when Peggy was born" (FL 168). Firmly placed within the domestic sphere by the gender roles of the time, Granny Linden spent her time on the estate, caring for the house and the growing number of offspring.

From the day and hour she was married Greta was either getting pregnant, being pregnant, or she was getting over being pregnant and there seemed to be no likelihood of a letup. He wasn't a bad man, her Ernie, better than most. Dozens of times he made sure and pulled out of her before there was any damage done, so to speak. But, when it came down to it, she couldn't always depend on him controlling himself at the vital moment, and there she'd be, trapped again. She'd had five children by the time she was twenty-seven, she was wearing out. Something had to be done. (FL 169)

A sense of obligation and inevitability permeates the description. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the woman as mother and housewife was a given in Belfast's society. Unlike Kay, Anna and also Ellen, who all determine the way they lead their lives themselves, Granny Linden and the women of her estate have no choice in those matters but are presented with the incontrovertible facts of tightly regulated social norms that sometimes take a hold before the women even realize it. "One wee girl arrived there already six or seven months gone. She didn't seem to understand properly what had happened to her, how this baby of hers had got inside her. She certainly had no idea where it was going to come out.

She cried herself sick when they told her. *But I'll break*, she kept saying. *I'll break*" (FL 170). In order to make their lot bearable, the women need to depend on female solidarity. "They agreed no woman need to have a child that didn't want to, and any new wives moving into the neighbourhood they made sure and put them wise, the young ones in particular" (FL 170). Communication between the sexes seems non-existent, and deviation from prescribed norms is bound to secrecy, as the rules remain officially inviolable.<sup>65</sup> Change becomes apparent when the first-born Peggy starts working as a nurse, and Drew and Ellen grow up into a more relaxed set of norms. Finally the Morris sisters, as self-determining women, represent the other end of the spectrum, portraying Belfast as a place where gender norms only continue to exist in a much softened form.

In the same vein, the representation of sex underscores a social development. Granny Linden recalls intercourse with her husband in a very matter-of-fact way, devoid of pleasure but interlaced with the worry about becoming pregnant again. This short remark is in no way comparable to sex between Drew and Kay or Drew and Anna. Female needs and orgasms play an important role in these descriptions, and the experiences are described with much emphasis on bodily movements and sensuality. Sex is no longer a mere means of reproduction, but something women enjoy.<sup>66</sup>

A similarly divergent representation of sexuality also features in *Number 5*. Like in *Fat Lad*, not only the attitudes towards sexuality are subject to change, but also the language in which the subject is addressed. Stella equates her objections to the inhibiting social norms women adhere to during the 1950s with her secret sexual desires, imparting on both notions dirty and unwanted connotations. This is shown more in the silent indignation caused by her own thoughts than in the language, as Stella's narrative is characterized by a very chaste style whenever the topic of sexuality is addressed. In merely writing down the word 'fuck' Stella breaks such

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<sup>65</sup> Neil Corcoran puts emphasis on the element of quiet rebellion, when he writes about the Linden family history "giving expression to the usually occluded histories of women, who are seen as subversively undermining, even while officially supportive of Protestant male prerogative" (161-2).

<sup>66</sup> Caroline Magennis points out that Patterson is one of the few male Northern Irish novelists to present an optimistic image of sexuality, which entails positive experiences for both genders (155).

a strong taboo she becomes scared of her own daring, and accordingly sexual desires are phrased with the help of allusion. The sentence “I grew sulky, felt a faint stirring of rebelliousness at the tops of my thighs” (N5 66) constitutes one of her more outspoken statements.

In the following chapters sexuality is addressed in a much more uninhibited and outspoken way. Catriona’s and Mel’s stories especially provide more than one example of it. Catriona’s first thought when her daughter approaches her parents with important news is not directed towards Patricia’s spirituality: “‘I’m saved,’ she said, and I was so prepared for ‘pregnant’ that it was a moment or two before I took it in” (N5 202). While she is by no means pleased, Catriona considers this possibility as realistic and thus acknowledges that sexual activity is not limited to married couples. Her matter-of-fact wording when voicing her fears also alludes to a more relaxed stance towards the subject. Talking about it is no longer the absolute taboo it was in Stella’s narrative.

Mel and Tony, members of a new generation, handle their own sexuality very liberally, differentiating between physical desire and emotions seemingly without difficulty. The narrative depicts the sexually charged language they use as a play between friends. “I flung the knickers at the closing door and followed them up with a volley of insults, which chased her down the stairs. ‘Slutty fucker! Dirt bird!’” (N5 242) The frequent and mutual insults and good-natured taunts show the two young people at ease with their sexuality, openly displaying it within Number 5:

We ate on the floor in front of the TV, a repeat cable cookery programme. Like fucking while watching a porno, said Toni. Not, I said, that she’d know anything about that, and she gave me her Saint Antonia face then gave me the chopstick finger.

“Fuck away off, you,” she said, in that acquired accent of hers. (N5 255)

However, these representations of sexuality are firstly limited to heterosexuality and secondly to a private and domestic environment. While Catriona describes love-making with her husband as an intimate and joyous affair, establishing it as an integral part of life, she also depicts the less than tolerant reactions of the neighbourhood towards a work of art with homosexual connotations that is



exhibited in her place of work. The picture shows a policeman from behind, with lowered trousers, a gloved hand on his buttocks. It provokes a public outrage and neighbourhood protest. The Belfast society of the 1990s as portrayed in the novel has loosened its social norms, accepting more progressive and outspoken attitudes towards heterosexuality, but homosexuality still constitutes a serious taboo, especially when located in the public sphere. The police uniform depicted in the work of art connects sexual deviation from the norm within an official state apparatus, and this is a suggestion strongly opposed by a majority of the people living in the neighbourhood. This example illustrates once again that change constitutes a slow and continuous process in Patterson's novels. Traditional perspectives still exert considerable influence on society in general as well as on individuals, and new attitudes only gradually replace old norms. While Catriona and her daughter represent liberal views about sexuality and marriage, their husband and father is less forward-thinking in these matters and begrudges Tony and her then boyfriend Rory their lifestyle: "I think to be honest what's really bothering your daddy is that the two of them aren't married.' 'Oh, for heaven's sake! In this day and age?' said Patricia, with all the vehemence of the de-converted" (N5 234).

*Number 5* and *Fat Lad* portray changing norms of gender roles and sexuality as an ongoing process integral to the character of the city. While in the past normative life stories made up the image of Belfast, as can be seen in the narrative of Granny Linden, new concepts of living based on equality and self-fulfilment constitute a central part of the contemporary city. Especially the strong character of Kay shapes the imagination of Belfast as presented in *Fat Lad*. However, at the same time the life stories of her sister and Drew's relatives that are interwoven with the main plot, counteract Kay's pervasive influence and introduce alternative narratives, creating an atmosphere of heterogeneity. The focus on individuals highlights the effect the process of change has on individual subjects. While some look towards the future, others hold on to traditional norms and social conventions. The different attitudes concerning sexuality displayed throughout the temporal settings of *Fat Lad* and *Number 5* show the scope of the

spectrum and emphasise change as a continuous act of balance between various perspectives.

### Urban History

The individual in the light of historical change constitutes an important element of Glenn Patterson's urban imagination. He frequently portrays Belfast's history from the perspective of one or more of his characters, highlighting not only the importance of temporal development, but also how interwoven the general and the particular are. The city's past shapes society as well as its individual members, the two being mutually dependent.<sup>67</sup> The impact of historical events and developments on individual subjects shows the urban environment as a lived space whose inhabitants bestow it with meaning. References to the past place both the city and individual life stories within history and connect the bigger urban picture with the small-scale existence of the single subject.

In *That Which Was*, the reference to the public figure of Paddy Devlin, founding member of the SDLP and minister in the power-sharing executive during the 1970s, is coloured by the experiences of Guy Broudie, a member of Avery's congregation. The combination of public knowledge and a singular perspective highlights the impact of individual life stories on the city's official history and vice versa:

Guy Broudie did not talk much about his career in the civil service. He volunteered even less. When Paddy Devlin died the previous year, Avery asked had Guy ever come into contact with him.

Guy nodded. He was my minister for a time. Health and Social Services.

Paddy Devlin was a socialist and a Catholic. The time Guy so matter-of-factly referred to was precisely 148 days. January to May 1974. The first, doomed attempt at power-sharing.

History.

I read somewhere he would only eat in the staff canteen, Avery said.

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<sup>67</sup> "No longer does the subject's alienation – as defined by Bachelard – derive from the impossibility of integrating individual identity into the urban texture and from the threat that the city poses to the self. Rather the opposite is now true: The self and the city are strictly interconnected, the dialectics of inside and outside take place, harmonically, within the urban text. The self maps itself by mapping the city, the inner landscape of the individual is an extension of the outer geography of the city, both at a fictional and autobiographical level" (Pelaschiar, "The City as Text" 185).

Guy pursed his lips, nodded more slowly. I enjoyed working with him. A good minister in the making.

You must have seen a few.

More than I care to remember. The seventies especially. It was like a revolving door up there. (TWW 154-5)

In Guy's small comments a historical development gains a human touch. Dry facts and dates turn into personal narratives and establish the city's past as a socially experienced space. Mention of the ropeworks one member of Ken Avery's congregation used to work in further highlights the intrinsic connection between official city history and individual experiences. It establishes a bond between the man's personal past and that of the city and depicts the individual as a vital part of the urban complex. The superlative of the factory in East Bread Street, "[t]he biggest in the world" (TWW 90), reflects not only on Belfast as an urban unity but also on its individual members, especially on those who, by working there, continually contribute to the success of the business. This pride in individual as well as the city's achievements survives the company itself, and although the ropeworks have closed down, they still provide an element of identification. The company's name carries historical meaning for the individual consciousness and the city's consciousness alike and establishes a connection between the two.

While the public in the mundane instances described above is limited to people living in close proximity to each other, *Number 5* also provides an example in which individual experiences and public history intersect. The murder of András Hideg quickly becomes a part of the city's collective history, and public comments on the crime are numerous, ranging from newspaper reports to news bulletins that include official voices. On the day they move into Number 5 the Eliots watch on TV how Hideg's coffin is carried through their own street. Long after they have moved out of the house again, Ivy still tells the story of the murder to Mel and Toni. The longstanding neighbour, who in the narrative repeatedly becomes the intrusion from outside, the personified public sphere crashing into private domesticity, has claimed the story for herself and keeps it alive through continued repetition. The loss the Hideg's close relatives, above all his wife,

experienced the day the man was killed, becomes a loss for the community, too. However, one important differentiation between the public and private perspectives remains. While “the Hungarian man was in a sense everyone’s history and Ivy’s tone was as a consequence a little more detached, a little less rawly emotional” (N5 266), the grief Jill Hideg felt and still feels is of another dimension. Watching the TV report, Catriona contrasts the public reactions with that of the dead man’s wife:

It was, the police said, a cowardly and despicable attack on a man who had already overcome great hardship in his life.

His wife Jill (53) said simply that her heart was broken. (N5 185)

The police’s analytical and sober comment is contrasted by Jill’s purely emotional statement. Thus, as the private grief the widow feels is brought into the public sphere, the two dimensions for once also remain distinctly apart. The narrative invokes the binarism, playing with its opposed terms and rearranging their positions.

Connections between private and public events appear in *Fat Lad* as well. Drew’s recollections of his childhood are closely entangled with the history of the city, and the atmosphere in public space mirrors that in the domestic space of the Lindens’ home. As a young boy Drew witnesses the deterioration of the political climate in Belfast and an increase in violence. The latter is not only directed towards individual persons, but enters the public arena when fear spreads throughout the city and public spaces become unsafe. Simultaneously, Drew’s relationship with his father turns sour when the parent starts to exercise mental and physical power over his son. The domestic violence Drew experiences remains unpredictable. Just as the bombings and explosions throughout the city remain incomprehensible for Drew, so do the beatings he receives from his father, because no explicit reason for them exists. The only pattern the boy notices is that the domestic violence coincides with violence in the city. For Drew and also his father, who in the aftermath of the beatings seems to always regret them, the

urban violence which shatters the city has infiltrated their personal lives.<sup>68</sup> In *Fat Lad* the division between the public and the private becomes blurred and the dimensions are no longer kept apart but merge together. Once again, the text rejects absolute categorisation and deconstructs the opposition of two antipodal terms.<sup>69</sup>

Two decades later Drew's relationships with his father and the city continue to develop simultaneously. His loathing for his parent and Belfast gradually lessens and turns into more moderate feelings as the memories of the violence grow paler. When Drew returns from England, the collective of the city has more or less renounced its troublesome past and is in the process of redefining itself as a modern European capital. Drew's father also has abjured his violent temper and tries to present himself to Drew in a new light. So, while the young man will probably never really warm to either of the two, he nevertheless makes his peace with both his father and Belfast and parts on amiable terms.<sup>70</sup>

Another historical event influences the public sphere of Belfast as well as the private one of the Lindens in *Fat Lad*: The Titanic. "Drew's Grandpa Linden, then a boy of sixteen and just started into his time, had worked on the building of the liner and its name was spoken with reference in the house long after his death" (FL 50). Personal and urban past intermingle as the iconic ship stands as a symbol for both the city's history and that of an individual life. This connection survives even though Drew emphasises the negative connotations the ship carries with it, "contemplating, as though for the first time, a single incontrovertible fact: *the fucking thing sank*. Where else, he had thought, but here could failure be so

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<sup>68</sup> This blurring of public and private can be extended to encompass Drew's family history. "The network of entanglements, the complex of loyalties and betrayals, of affection and violence, in this family also acts as a metaphor for, or an analogue of the political violence of the province on Drew's return" (Corcoran 161).

<sup>69</sup> *Fat Lad* does not remain the only novel in which public and private violence is portrayed as connected to each other. Colin Bateman's *Cycle of Violence* shows sectarian hatred as interrelated with familial and sexual aggression, blurring the boundaries of the binarism (Kirkland, *Identity Parades* 97).

<sup>70</sup> Although Francesca Bovone reads love into the narrative of *Fat Lad* where I read acceptance, she too sees the intrinsic connection between Drew's relationship to Belfast and his father: "While he witnesses the changes taking place in Belfast, Drew's feelings start changing as well: the city slowly grown on him, until he literally loves it; this process goes hand in hand with Drew's forgiveness of his father's past behaviour. By the end of the novel, he has managed to come to terms with his father, his city and his own identity" (19-20).

revered?” (FL 51)<sup>71</sup> The disillusioned youngster attributes the failure spatially to the city, but he also transfers it to his own family. He lays it bare as a dysfunctional unit, riddled with what he sees as unrealised ambitions. Many events in the family history can be read as failure.<sup>72</sup> Drew’s great-uncle Michael’s death off the Normandy coast constitutes one example, and the analogy to the Titanic is established by the repeated sardonic parenthesis “(Irishglug and Irishgurgle)” (FL 51 & 52). Even Drew’s own conception can be regarded as a failure for his mother, who swore not to conceive any more children after Ellen, and although the father gets his wish for a male heir, as a consequence he fails to keep his wife, for he never “did get her back again properly” (FL178). Granny Linden makes out the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a personal failure for her husband, once again connecting historical developments with personal stories. While she herself is able to regard political developments and change with ironic detachment, she does not attest the same notion to her deceased partner:

[T]he whole family had congregated in front of the television and watched as Prime Minister Thatcher and Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, seated at a table in Hillsborough Castle, put their signatures to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, triggering a crackle of camera shutters and a pyrotechny of flashes, like a parodic presentiment of the ructions that were to follow in the towns and cities across Northern Ireland.

From her already habitual position on the pouffe, two feet from the screen, Tina, a news and current affairs veteran at six and a half [...] turned to her parents and, worried by the dire prognoses of dissenting politicians, asked:

– Does that mean we’re something else now?

Her parents were none too sure themselves. Her grandda’s head said one thing and his teeth another. Only her great-granny seemed not to be in any doubt.

– What we are is what we’ve always been, wee love. Doesn’t matter how much they tinker. The ordinary people had nothing before Stormont, they’d nothing under Stormont, and they’ve had no more since.

Later, however, when Ellen brought her grandmother a bedtime drink, she found her sitting up in bed, dabbing at her eyes with a corner of the sheet, laughing.

– Poor Ernie, she said. All those years he spent worrying about keeping ahead and in the end all’s it took to beat him was two pens. (FL 180-1)

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Kirkland regards the Titanic, like the goldfish, as one more symbol for Belfast’s dead end position (*Identity Parades* 117).

<sup>72</sup> Including the sorry fate of the goldfish, which, as a symbol of “heroic failure [...] ceaselessly follows its own tail around and around the confined space in the bowl” (Smyth *The Novel and the Nation* 130).

Ernie's personal ambitions to ensure the position of the Ulster Protestants fail with the Anglo-Irish Agreement that ensures the Republic an advisory role in some Northern Irish matters and makes a change of nationality possible in case a majority in both parts of the island votes for it. While the rest of the family also momentarily fear the loss of identity, thus showing how much it is defined in national terms, Granny Linden dismisses this notion of identification and puts emphasis on the matters of the 'ordinary people'. In this case she strictly separates personal narratives from official history, and although this does not seem to tally with the examples mentioned above, which strive to connect the two, it nevertheless has the same effect: The text places its focus on the individual, and the city does not represent an abstract complex but an amalgamation of narratives. The ordinary people ensure the character of the city (as opposed to the problematic nation), while political decisions play a subordinated role.

Similarly, the old woman remains unfazed by petty and – for her world – ultimately marginal developments such as changes of nationality. "Her Granny told [Ellen], further, that she had lived in two different countries without ever moving more than three doors from the house where she was born, but Ellen had no idea what that made her, except maybe, magic" (FL 155). In this instance Massey's claim that women are attributed with a specific and often domesticized space, while male figures are identified with more abstract and also more public spatial concepts, resonates strongly. However, Patterson manages to turn this stigma into a statement of self-assurance and individuality. In her belief in the centrality of ordinary lives, whose focus lies not in abstract spheres but in the everyday existence of the subject, Granny Linden expresses a self-contained identity that is ultimately independent of such normative influences as nationality and allows for an amalgamation of heterogeneous individuals rather than a politically synchronized (or opposed) mass. In Granny Linden's view, ordinary people are not exempt from historicity. Their experiences simply do not tally with official ones but constitute a much more heterogeneous and personalised past.

This message is also transported in *The International*. Being set exactly one day before a historically important date, the novel focuses on individual narratives rather than political events.

If I had known history was written that Sunday in The International Hotel I might have made an effort to get out of bed before teatime. [...] But then if history was so easy to predict it might never have a chance to happen at all for the crowds of people wanting to have their photographs taken to say, 'I was here'. In any case I had worked a fourteen-hour shift the day before and had fallen in love twice and twice been rebuffed, which seemed pretty momentous to me at the time, and I felt entitled to a little self-indulgence. (TI 9)

Danny puts highly individual and personal experiences into the centre of his tale, focusing on the micronarratives that establish Belfast as a multi-faceted place, brought to life by a network of social acts. Ingrid and Stanley, the unwitting recipients of Danny's love, rank infinitely higher and more life-changing to him than a political development that has no comparable immediate effect on his life. "So I turned my back on the bigger story [...] – turned my back and buried my head in the covers, comforting myself with bitter-sweet thoughts of Ingrid and Stanley and the campfire stench of my vest and underpants" (TI 10). The bigger story shrinks to a minor reference, with no influence on the further turn of the story. Other events place the historical meeting at the margins and establish the city as heterogeneous space in which multiple narratives intermingle.

The day before the inaugural meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in January 1967, the morning of the day of the Portadown Bun Boycott, a blaze broke out in Belfast city centre. I saw the flames above the rooftops as I got off the bus in Glengall Street and being, as usual, half an hour and more early for work, and flames of that size not then being regular sights in the city, I did what everyone else appeared to be doing that morning (fires after all looking much more like our idea of history in the making) and walked towards their source. (TI 10)

Mention of the Portadown Bun Boycott alongside the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association deconstructs the hierarchical compositions of female and male topics as questioned by Massey. The Civil Rights meeting constitutes part of the political and thus male sphere, while the Bun Boycott denotes a protest organised by the Housewives' League because



bakers have increased their bread prices (TI 90). This, according to the prevalent connotations, domestic and female matter is in no way subordinated to the political meeting, making out the city as a democratic space that does not privilege the public over the domestic, the male over the female, or the general over the individual. Instead the binarisms are deconstructed, as topics, interests and life styles exist next to each other and form a colourful urban complex.

### **Conclusion: The Temporal Perspective**

The temporal dimension that informs all of Patterson's novels, as he places his urban setting in its historical context, establishes Belfast as a city whose only characteristic is change. This becomes apparent on both a material as well as social level. Narratives span long durations or utilise the literary techniques of analepses and prolepses in order to compare two or more different temporal settings and to chart the physical transformation of Belfast within interconnected descriptions of the cityscape. The Troubles are portrayed as one catalyst for the accelerated change of the urban environment, but capitalist interests influence the representation of a contemporary Belfast in *Fat Lad*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* even more. Transformations on a social level take place in congruence. While the urban conflict causes the city's society to become more closed off and sceptical of otherness, multiple relational networks and heterogeneous life stories always constitute an important part of Patterson's Belfast. The loosening of social norms stresses this last point further, as different gender roles, concepts of sexuality and race exist alongside each other. Past developments inform the image of the city and influence its material and social layout. At the same time the heterogeneous simultaneity remains an important characteristic. Belfast shows its many different faces at any given moment as it journeys through time. Historical events described in Patterson's novels give shape to the literary representation of Belfast and contextualise the setting within a timeframe. However, they do not rank above individual experiences but are often related to them. A connection between a public urban history and private life stories is assembled that establishes individual members of society as a vital part of the city. Looking at the

urban narratives from the temporal perspective allows for the inclusion of historical developments that connect material as well as social spaces.

### **Conclusion: A Threefold Analysis**

These three dimensions form the imaginary heart of Patterson's literary city. In structuring my analysis accordingly and dividing it into three chapters I have set out to show that Belfast in *Fat Lad*, *The International*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* consists of a material, a social and a temporal perspective. Firstly, descriptions of the urban layout, of houses and streets and the local detail Patterson meticulously includes in his narratives establish the physical space of the city. Belfast becomes a graspable reality in the novels. Secondly, this reality turns into a place because of the people populating it. The characters and their stories Patterson gathers fill the space with life and makes it humanly meaningful. The plethora of narratives establishes a network of social relations on the one hand and a life-affirming multiplicity on the other hand. Finally the inclusion of historical references establishes a simultaneity of times. Belfast is attested continuity but also a capacity for renewal, as the temporal perspective sheds new light on the material and social dimensions as well. Throughout the analysis of these three levels of Patterson's urbanity his tendency to present fluid concepts and elude mono-perspectival narratives remains apparent. As deconstructed binarisms and multiple storylines influence the three-dimensional representation of urbanity, the city's main characteristics become apparent again and again. Patterson's Belfast is a plural phenomenon that is determined by its people. It incorporates many versions of itself and its only constant is change.

The intensity and perseverance with which Patterson paints this image throughout his literary output, and the positive connotations he attributes to his urban imagination, establish him as a unique force in the Northern Irish literary tradition. Patterson's novels stand out in the canon of Belfast prose. The following chapter attests to this.

### **Comparative Perspectives**

At this point I would like to refer back to some of my earlier comments on the role of the city in literature, which have accompanied the theoretical background on spatiality. In “Spatial Perspectives” I have delineated a general overview of the representations of Belfast throughout the last century. While this overview helped to establish some dominant themes and tropes of Northern Irish literature and to contextualise Glenn Patterson’s writing, I did not, at that point, go into much detail. I would like to rectify this here. With the findings of the above analysis in mind, I want to compare the spatial imagery of these texts with novels by Northern Irish writers who focus on Belfast in their writing. Rather than taking a cursory glance at many texts, I choose to limit myself to a small number of texts, treating them in greater detail than would otherwise be possible. They stand as examples of the literary production of their time, and, while I am aware that they can never represent the output of a whole tradition, I nevertheless believe that a closer inspection of them, together with the more general comments I made on the role of the city in Irish literature at the beginning of this thesis, serves to illuminate Patterson’s extraordinary urban imagination and the complexity of his literary city in comparison to other Belfast novels. Because the different dimensions of the spatial, the social and the historical are mostly less pronounced in the novels I have chosen, I no longer structure my analysis accordingly. Instead, I want to concentrate on each text in turn, expounding on its representation of Belfast and setting it in relation to the urban imaginary of Patterson’s texts. In order to tie in with the general remarks on Belfast’s literary tradition, I have chosen three novels that are temporally removed from each other.

*The Emperor of Ice-Cream* is published in 1965, its author Brian Moore being amongst the best known novelists to put Belfast on the literary map, which, “up until this point, hadn’t achieved much of a showing in fiction” (Craig 12). The novel focuses on Belfast during World War II. Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street* (1996) is the novel quoted most often together with Glenn Patterson’s *Fat Lad* and *The International*. Both writers are part of the much hailed new generation of writers who in the 1990s creatively explore the complexities of

Belfast and develop new contemporary images of the city in literature. Eoin McNamee, for example, traces Belfast's topography in his haunting thriller *Resurrection Man* (1994). Based on the real story of the so-called Shankill Butchers, the narrative follows a group of violent Protestants and their leader Victor Kelly, who randomly kill Catholics. It focuses closely on Kelly's relation with the city and shows how he takes his power from the intricate knowledge of it. As is to be expected with regard to its topic and genre, *Resurrection Man* establishes Belfast as a place paralysed by violence. Sectarian forces (male) dominate a passively enduring society (predominantly female), devoid of life. *Resurrection Man* portrays "the city as cadaver. An inert, knowable thing, yielding its truths to necroscopic investigation" (Patterson, "Butchers' Tools" 43).

Another contemporary of Patterson and Wilson, Colin Bateman takes on a different strategy altogether. His novels, which he has been churning out at an astonishing rate for some years now, belong to the genre of the thriller, too. However, stylistically they share *Eureka Street*'s satirical tone. Bateman mercilessly ridicules the bipolarity of the sectarian conflict. Already his first novel, *Divorcing Jack* (1994), did so with great gusto. Since then, Bateman has reduced the number of jokes, but enough slights at the expense of the two political opponents can still be found in the *Mystery Man* (2009), his last series on an idiosyncratic book seller / private detective. The change in quantity reflects the changes that have come to Bateman's favourite setting of Belfast, and so do the reasons for murder in his books. *Mystery Man* stirs well clear of any home-grown conflicts and instead warms up a plot involving an aging Nazi and his secret career at the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

The representation of Belfast in novels, also during the 1990s, is dominated by male perspectives. "Northern Irish novels, that is, those written by authors born in Northern Ireland and set in Northern Ireland, are written almost exclusively in English and, with a few notable exceptions such as Jennifer Johnston, Deirdre Madden and Joan Lingard, almost exclusively written by male authors" (Magennis 13). Amongst these exceptions, Deirdre Madden is most concerned with writing about the city. Her 1996 novel *One by One in the Darkness* portrays the lives of three sisters after the murder of their father by paramilitaries. In this

novel Belfast's urban ugliness is repeatedly set against the beauty of Northern Irish countryside. Of the three sisters only Helen has chosen to live in the city, but she feels no affection for it. Throughout *One by One in the Darkness* Belfast's deficiencies, its negative aspects, outweigh the positive ones. The opposite is the case with Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*. In it Belfast is represented with as much affection as it is in Glenn Patterson's novels. The two bodies of work pursue very similar goals and thus lend themselves naturally to comparison. Indeed, Eamonn Hughes calls the two writers the "Glimmer Twins of Irish prose" ("Belfastards and Derriers" 156), referring to their shared determination to 'update Belfast's fictional map' and to rid the city from the overbearing narrative of the Troubles – or to at least readjust the perspective.

Lastly, David Park's *The Truth Commissioner* is published quite recently in 2008. While in the 1990s it looks as if a new era has begun, and a number of urban (prose) literature set in Belfast will follow the radically new Belfast novels of that decade, these expectations are only partly met in the new millennium. David Park is one of the few writers who frequently revisits Belfast in his novels and treats the city extensively in them. His latest novel shares themes and preoccupations with *That Which Was*, as it focuses on the lasting implications the Troubles have on present day Belfast and its citizens.

### **Brian Moore's *The Emperor of Ice-Cream***

Born in Belfast, Brian Moore leaves both the city and the country in his early twenties. The writer never again lives in his place of birth, but he returns to it in his writings. All three of his Northern Irish novels are "uncompromisingly urban – there is almost no landscape or sense of nature in his work" (Foster, *Forces and Themes* 151). Belfast constitutes a harrowing and intense presence in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Feast of Lupercal* (1957) and finally *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*. This *Bildungsroman* (Dahlie 49; Maher 430) focuses on Gavin Burke, a young dropout who has failed his leaving certificates. Instead of resitting them, Gavin joins one of the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precaution) units that are formed throughout Belfast at the start of the Second World War and, in doing so, offends both his family's cultural background and his father's academic ambitions

for him, because Gavin is supposed to follow his big brother Owen's example and enrol at Queen's University. As part of the Catholic and nationalist community in Belfast, the Burke family, dominated by the father's opinions, does not support British military involvement in World War II. Mr Burke, in fact, vociferously and gleefully predicts Hitler's victory over Britain. For Gavin and his colleagues boring night shifts punctuated by seemingly pointless drills turn the A.R.P. job into an ordeal. They are a motley crew of Catholics and Protestants, of long-term unemployed and alcoholics as well as war widows and aging ex-soldiers. Nevertheless they quickly band together against their sadistic unit leader, and Gavin befriends Freddy. The Communist is streetwise and successful with the girls, attributes that Gavin is eager to emulate. Gavin himself has fallen for Sally, a student nurse at the nearby hospital, but becomes more and more frustrated by her refusal to engage in anything more physical than kissing. The young man's self-esteem suffers further from the ridicule all members of the A.R.P. units meet, as Belfast fails to attract the attention of Hitler's bombers. When the air raids eventually do take place, Gavin works tirelessly, helping the wounded and laying out the dead. He finally finds the confidence to stand up to his father, and, while Belfast is bombed into ruins, for the first time a future seems possible.

I have chosen to include *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* in this thesis for several reasons. For a start, the protagonist bears resemblances to the characters in Glenn Patterson's early novels, most notably *Fat Lad* and *The International*. Like the young Drew, Gavin longs to escape his hometown, feeling smothered by its rigid conventions. He exhibits a thirst for adventure and life that is reminiscent of Danny, narrator of *The International*. Both of them in their first jobs, they stand at the brink of adulthood, marvelling at the possibilities of this new and foreign world. *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* is also Brian Moore's most optimistic novel, as, for the first time, one of his protagonists manages to at least partially rid himself from the oppressive social order that is dominated by staunch Catholicism (Maher 429). Like Danny's or Stella's rebellions, Gavin's resistance remains low-scale, the text focusing on a personal development. The optimistic note, however, rarely extends towards the description of Belfast itself. Here Brian Moore very much stays within the (Northern) Irish tradition of representing the city in

decidedly negative terms. Outside of his prose the writer's "views on the city have been well-documented in his radio and television interviews, where he comments on its repressive, sectarian nature, its resistance to change, its immutability" (Maher 422) – all attributes that Glenn Patterson, thirty years later, expressively writes against in his novels. Moore's personal opinions infuse his literary representation of Belfast. Accordingly, Gavin perceives his surroundings as narrow and restrictive. This begins in the privacy of the Burkes' home and continues in the public space of the neighbourhood and urban streets. Within the house, there is no nook or corner Gavin does not know in all its details, and this familiarity inhibits him in his quest for new experiences. "He looked into the looking glass. In that world, encircled by the looking glass frame, he had acted and reacted, had left his mark, and had, in turn, been marked" (*Emperor of Ice-Cream* 9).<sup>73</sup> Firmly enclosed within the frame of the looking glass, his parents' living room is a vivid reminder of the childhood he strives to leave behind him, seeking entry into a grown-up world. But this social group appears as yet just beyond his reach. Not only his parent's house, but also his neighbourhood keep him within the known boundaries of a boy's life. Looking out of the window of his bedroom, he sees "a clothesline on which a girl's knickers flew. Beyond the narrow garden was a back entry and beyond that were the backs of the houses in the adjoining avenue. From habit, he looked at the window where the typist sometimes stood, her dress off, brushing her long chestnut hair" (EofIC 8). The knickers and the conjured image of the typist are part of Gavin's as yet unfulfilled fantasies. The grown-up world holds the allure of sexual experience that cannot be attained in the bedroom he shares with his older brother. In his parents' house Gavin remains a child. He is reduced to spying on his older sister Kathy in the bathroom, and can only dream about the unattainable woman he observes through the window. Indeed, the typist makes for the most exciting view, as a glance beyond the boundaries of the narrow garden reveals nothing new whatsoever. Instead, Gavin is greeted by a row of houses similar to his own and the repetitive boredom and familiarity of his neighbourhood. This image is extended to Gavin's

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<sup>73</sup> From now on abbreviated as 'EofIC' in parenthetical citations.

place of work. For the A.R.P. units simple terraced houses serve as improvised headquarters. Whether at home or on the job, Gavin can never escape the narrowness and restrictive architecture that characterises the textual Belfast in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*. The description of the headquarters in Crummick Street also includes the social divisions dominating the city, referring to categories of class as well as religion:

The house was small, the corner house in a row of red-brick workingmen's dwellings in a street sown with children who played chalk games on the pavements, wound ropes around street lamps to make Maypoles, and scrawled NO POPE HERE and UP THE PRODS in its narrow back entries. It was a street to which cloth-capped, collarless men returned heavy with porter when the pubs shut, a street in which husbands slapped pinafores wives, wives slapped small children, and grandmothers screamed imprecations at grandfathers who urinated too near the weekly wash in the back yard. (EofIC 12)

The depiction of Crummick Street is one of the bleakest in the narrative. Both its physical reality as well as its social make-up emanate an inescapable constriction. The small houses and narrow back entries with their offensive graffiti provide the suitable background for the hopeless and repetitive routine of the inhabitants. The chain of violence permeating the street suggests inevitability. The children will grow up to lead their parents' dissatisfied lives until finally turning into their own grandparents. The imagery links the sectarian implications with Belfast's working-class population – a relation which is further strengthened in Gavin's description of his colleagues: "[T]hey are the sort of men who never wear collars and ties, the sort my father says wear their shirts 'drawn simply to the neck, by a brass stud.' They're men who were years on the dole, the men you see hanging around street corners on the Falls and Shankill Roads" (EofIC 39). In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* the two fiercely sectarian neighbourhoods are the poorest and the ones that suffer most from the unemployment that has threatened the citizens of Belfast since the big industries have begun their decline in the 1930s. Despite their passionate and deep-seated dislike for each other, as implied by the kid's graffiti, the two communities are nevertheless forced to live in close proximity to each other. The short distance of "only three blocks" (EofIC 12) from Crummick Road to the Catholic hospital, which Gavin's unit reports to,



brings home the narrow layout of Belfast's material spatiality. The narrative portrays the city's neighbourhoods and different areas as too close together for comfort, as cramped and suffocating.

But Gavin's feelings of claustrophobia also stem from social restrictions he experiences both within his family and community. Suffering from fear of examination and extremely fed up with the strict schooling he had to endure, he cannot and will not meet his father's high expectations. Instead he feels pressurized by his brother's academic success and the continued lack of understanding the whole family shows for his job. As months without an air raid pass, Gavin himself increasingly fears he has gotten himself into dead-end situation without the possibility of escape (EoIC 179).

The Catholic values of his social environment further restrict him. Gavin resents the all-encompassing dominance of the religiously subscribed way of life, and the prolonged effect it has on his actions and his conscience. The latter comes to life in the figures of the Black Angel and the White Angel sitting on the boy's shoulders and in that of a small statue in his bedroom: The Divine Infant of Prague, "a desperate little preacher" (EofIC 3).

The most immediate effect of religious restriction Gavin suffers in relation to Sally. His hopes on having sex with her dwindle to nothing, as she remains a firm believer throughout the narrative: "Bloody Catholic Girls" (EofIC 181). Gavin blames religion for his personal as well as Belfast's social situation, and in both cases change seems impossible. A dated picture in Sally's nursing home symbolises the city's social paralysis:

Underneath the photograph was a legend: MEDICAL STAFF & INTERNS. 1930. He looked at this photograph and felt uneasy. Nothing had changed in this room since 1930. Nothing would change. Out there, in the world, governments might be overthrown, capitals occupied, cities destroyed, maps redrawn, but here in Ireland, it made no difference. [...] Nothing would change. The care of this room would continue, as would the diurnal dirge of Masses all over the land, the endless litanies of evening devotions, the annual pilgrimages to holy shrines, the frozen ritual of Irish Catholicism perpetuating itself in *secula, seculorum*. [...] Even Hitler's victory would not alter this room. Armageddon would bypass Ireland; all would remain still in this land of his forefathers. (EofIC135-6)

As Catholicism resists all change, even a war of extraordinary dimension cannot affect the Irish backwater of Belfast. The nation and the city are paralysed, forever caught up in their own backwardness and provinciality, and Gavin relates his own failures to this dead-end situation. He sees his only escape in the British army and is repeatedly tempted to leave for England (EofIC 179). Gavin's reasons are manifold, but they all relate back to his negative feelings for the city and its society. Being a soldier would finally give him a responsible and meaningful task. He longs for a challenge he can rise to in order to establish himself as a worthy member of the grown-up world. The army would take him out of his overfamiliar surroundings, enabling him to leave both Belfast and his childhood behind. And finally it would free him from the dominant Catholic conscience pervading the city. In his imagination, England is full of love-hungry girls, who are free from Sally's inhibiting moral beliefs. A school friend's reasons for joining up confirm Gavin's own hopes:

"Anyway, I'm on leave. I'm going to England next week to train as a pilot. Jimmy Gilroy and I."

"Wasn't Gilroy bloody nearly an I.R.A. man?"

"Yes, but he's a good rugby player, you know. That counts with the R.A.F. selection people. Both he and I tried out for Ulster last year and both of us were put up for commissions the minute we let that slip."

"But why did you join up, Fitz?"

"Don't know. I was fed up at home. Besides, I hear the women over in England are man-starved and hot as coals. When Jimmy and I are covered in Air Force blue, we plan to be bloody great studs up and down the land."

"So you joined up just for intercourse?"

"It's a clear-cut motive," Fitzpatrick said. "I mean, do you think anyone ever joins up for purely patriotic motives, even the English? Fellows join up because they want to leave home, see some excitement, stuff girls, and so on. All of them."

"But you could get killed. What about this Battle of Britain caper?"

"At least," Fitzpatrick said, "I won't die wrestling to get my man in between the thighs of some cold Irish virgin. This uniform's going to liberate me. Nobody will notice my acne or my bad teeth, because I'll be Pilot Officer Fitzpatrick, an officer and gent. The uniform works miracles, believe you me. Look at that slob, Moriarty, tonight." (EofIC 166)

As Moriarty is at this moment courting Sally, the very last remark underlines Gavin's failure with the other sex yet again, showing him the solution in the form of Moriarty's uniform.

The quotation also highlights that nationalist feelings or a sense of duty do not feature within the boys' considerations at all. On the contrary, coming from a Catholic background they are prepared to act against the principles of their social environment. Just like the British army does not seem too adamant when it comes to accepting adversaries into their ranks, the young generation Gavin belongs to easily dismisses cultural allegiances to further their own interests.

However, the vast part of Belfast citizens does not handle social beliefs this flexibly. Gavin is acutely aware of how deep-seated the anti-British sentiment is within the Catholic community in general. On the one hand his own family provides the best example; on the other hand the community along the Falls Road gives a very bright indication of it. A colleague of Gavin's

lived with his tubercular wife and four children in the Falls Road, a fiercely Catholic, fiercely nationalist, working-class district. What most of his Falls Road neighbors felt about this war could be summed up in the fact that they considered it a point of honor to leave a light shining in their upstairs windows at night in case any German bombers might come over the city. Your Man, a former member of the I.R.A., agreed with the slogan that England's adversity is Ireland's opportunity, but he no longer had great hopes of the I.R.A. as a force to overthrow the British. He put his money on Hitler. When Hitler won the war, Ireland would be whole again, thirty-two counties, free and clear. (EoflC 57)

Gavin's family might be better off than the majority of people on the Falls Road, but their attitude does not differ much. Mr Burke and his sister are especially voracious in their views. Aunt Liz, whose husband was killed by the British in the fight for independence, feels very much affronted by Gavin's choice of profession: "'Gracious God,' Aunt Liz said. 'Did I ever think I'd live to see the day when my own nephew would stand in this room dressed up like the Black and Tan'. [...] '[S]urely you realize that these A.R.P. places will be filled with the scum of the Orange Lodges'" (EoflC 11). Portraying anything British as evil, Aunt Liz not only lumps together very different uniforms but also propagates false stereotypes on Gavin's colleagues. His unit is in fact made up of members of both religions, "and this circumstance creates curiously little tension" (Craig 21). Patricia Craig further comments that "sectarian conflict in the city has never been a preoccupation of Brian Moore's" (21). However, the writer definitely includes

many instances that point towards what is in in large parts a bigoted and divided society in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*. Mr Burke's "Irish Catholic bigotry" (Kennedy-Andrews, "The Novel and the Northern Troubles" 240) serves as another example of this, even though Gavin's perspective reveals his father's nationalism and sectarian prejudices as unstable and unreasonable constructions. Like Aunt Liz Mr Burke tends towards exaggeration and remains adamant and inflexible in his opinions, only to take on the opposite stance with equal conviction when proven guilty.<sup>74</sup> His nationalism and belief in the righteousness of the Irish cause can only be upheld by an unwavering focus on the failures of Britain and Protestant Ulster:

He shook the paper out and began to read, his full lips pouting at the news. Gavin, watching him, decided that his father read the newspaper as other men play cards, shuffling through a page of stories until he found one which would confirm him in his prejudice. A Jewish name discovered in an account of a financial transaction, a Franco victory over the godless Reds, a hint of British perfidy in international affairs, an Irish triumph on the sports field, and evidence of Protestant bigotry, a discovery of Ulster governmental corruption: these were his reading goals. (EofIC 32)

Picking the bits of news that underpin his biased convictions, Mr Burke creates his own reality and becomes ridiculous in the eyes of his son. Recognising his father's method of bending facts towards his favour, Gavin rejects his father's nationalist prejudices as artificially constructed fictions and relates them to the outdated provincialism in Ireland (Craig 21) that he himself struggles against. Gavin's acquaintances across sectarian and social divides and his encounters with "Jews, left-wing ministers, pansies, poets, boozers, puppeteers" (EofIC 97) provide an alternative perspective of Belfast's urbanity, focusing on an open and heterogeneous society. However, firstly the attributes only apply to isolated pockets of society, and secondly this "underside" (EofIC 97) overstretches even Gavin's own capacity for difference, and makes him long for a "normal life"

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<sup>74</sup> His early conviction that "the German jackboot isn't half as hard as the heel of John Bull" (EofIC 32) turns into an "Ah, well. I've said it before and I'll say it again. The German jackboot is a far crueller burden than the heel of old John Bull" (EofIC 215), after the Germans have bombed Belfast.

(EofIC 97). Overall, therefore, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* portrays a stagnant and highly prejudiced city.

Belfast's isolated geographical location and diminishing industrial power results in a distinct lack of German bombs. Accordingly, Gavin continuously has to justify his job to family, friends and strangers and sees his own expectations disappointed. For he would dearly love to see the dull town of Belfast finally forced into action, even if it came at the price of death and devastation. At least this would give him a chance to prove himself and make his induction into adult life possible (EofIC 112). Similarly, Gavin's colleagues long for a justification of their job, as all members of the A.R.P. suffer ever more ridiculing on a wide social scale. "In the past month there had been three yellow, or preliminary, warnings, followed by siren alerts. Nothing had happened. It was a sour joke around Belfast that the sirens were sounded at night to wake the A.R.P. personnel from their slumber" (EofIC 153). When the Germans bomb neutral Dublin, desperation reaches its absurd climax, and speculations turn into a plea for recognition. "'What's the matter with them, the idjits?' Jimmy Lynan complained. 'Why don't they come on up here?'" (EofIC 175) The actual attack lets most of the A.R.P. workers quickly forget about their wishes. Gavin, however, initially revels in the destruction of the place that has restricted him all his life. The rubble and flames free him from his own past that has been weighing him down and has drawn him into the city's paralysis. "For the first time in his life, the here and now, not the past or the future takes on a crucial significance" (Dahlie 48). He feels invulnerable, witnessing the destruction emotionally and physically detached from the top of the nursing home:

And in that moment, within Gavin, there started an extraordinary elation, a tumult of joy. He felt like dancing a Cherokee war dance on the edge of the parapet. The world had come to him at last. Tonight, in the Reichschancellery of Berlin, generals stood over illuminated maps, plotting Belfast's destruction. Hitler himself smiled in glee, watching the graphs of the planes' progress. Tonight, history had conferred the drama of war on this dull, dead town in which he had been born. And what about your parents? Asked the White Angel. What about Kathy and Owen, down there in the darkness. And you. You too can be blown to smithereens.

But there, there was the joy. He had no fear: he did not care. He was actually smiling, impervious to his danger, enjoying the bombing as though it were a military tattoo, put on for his benefit.

[...]

“Hey, see over there. “ His own voice was elated. “Look. That one’s on the Ormeau Road, I’ll bet.”

“Maybe on Reverend Batshaw’s house,” Freddy said. “Go on. Blow up old Baldy Batshaw.”

The Reverend Batshaw, an archenemy of Freddy’s, had once threatened to put the police on Freddy for going around with the Reverend’s underage daughter.

[...] Come on, Hitler. Blow up his bloody church.”

“Yes, and blow up St. Michan’s,” Gavin shouted, prancing in his war dance on the roof.

“Blow up City Hall.”

“And Queen’s University.”

“And Harland and Wolff’s.”

“Blow up the Orange Hall.”

“And the cathedral and the dean.”

“Jesus, what a show.”

[...]

“Blow up a few capitalists,” Freddy shouted, suddenly.

“And the Bishop of Down and Connor,” Gavin yelled.

“And Stormont Castle and Lord Carson’s statue and the houses of bloody Parliament.”

“Not with a whimper, but a bang.”

“Right you are, Gavin boy. A big bang.”

The stood for a moment, drunk with the bombers’ power. (EofIC 199-202)

Shouting out places of importance as well as houses they are personally connected to, like Gavin’s old school St. Michan’s, Gavin and Freddy revel in the destruction of everything that represents the constricting power of the city and its society for them, be that institutional, governmental or religious.

Back on the streets Gavin’s perception becomes itself more levelled, as the narrative, on the one hand, focuses very much on the destruction of the material city. A landmine has blown up “a whole row of houses in one go-off” (EofIC 208) in the Shankill, the Falls are bombed (EofIC 239), and so are the Royal Avenue (EofIC 243), the shipyards (EofIC 215) and York Street (EofIC 245). Gavin registers the changed landscape of Cliftonville Road, where “[e]very morning of his school life he had passed The Swan” (EofIC 246), a pub that has now disappeared completely. Likewise the “Presbyterian church which Gavin used to pass each day on his way to and from school” (EofIC 210) is destroyed. The trail of destruction runs across the city centre, including both places that constitute central and public landmarks and places of personal recollection for Gavin. At this moment his life appears very much interwoven with the material reality of the

city. On the other hand the narrative focuses on the devastating effects this has on Belfast society, portraying it not as a community that bands together in distress but as a dysfunctional mass of people. Everybody fends for themselves, personal gain and safety being the top priorities. Boys carry boxes of sweets out of destroyed shops (EofIC 208). Passengers of a truck that is set to leave the city are intent on lightening the load by kicking two women off the cargo area (EofIC 218). A frail and injured woman stands as yet another reminder of the deep-seated hatred between the communities, when she first blames the IRA for the attack and then refuses to be brought into the nearest hospital. “Well, youse can let me die in the street, so youse can. If you think I’m going into any Fenian hospital run by them nuns to get myself poisoned and kilt, then youse have another think coming. Take me to the Royal Victoria, boys” (EofIC 204). Even in the light of destruction and annihilation the rifts running through the community remain clearly visible. This negative picture is complemented by the devastating sights that Gavin comes across while working in the morgue. He and Freddy volunteer to help coffin the dead. The mutated and mangled bodies they are obliged to shift have lost all dignity. In death they are exposed and appear inhuman:

The first body Gavin and Freddy took hold of was that of a mill girl in her twenties, a body picked because it was nearest to the entrance. Her cold, stiff hand in his, Gavin dragged her behind him out of the door, into the thick, foggy drizzle of rain, dragging her corpse across the cold, wet concrete of the yard. In death, her bowels had loosened, and so, cutthroat razor in hand, he cut away her skirt, sweater, and underclothes, revealing the first naked body of an adult woman he had ever really looked at in his life. (232-3)

The corpse amongst so many others is nothing than a lifeless shell. In Brian Moore’s most intense descriptions of the citizens of Belfast, they are already dead. The social network, if it has ever existed in the narrative, is destroyed. This tallies with the image of the city as a dull dead town that, in the eyes of Gavin, deserves its destruction. Here *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* differs most blatantly from the novels of Glenn Patterson. In the latter the focus always lies very much on construction and positive change. In these texts the city is constantly being built, an ever-changing landscape always being added too. Even the destruction caused by terrorist bombs never lasts very long before the empty space is attributed with

new meaning. The city's future is always already in the planning. In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, Belfast remains unchanging and backward throughout most of the narrative. Gavin is caught up within the place of his past. A future becomes only possible through its utter destruction. The novel closes within the microcosm of Gavin's family home. Returning to the house after a long shift in the morgue, Gavin finds it still standing but condemned:

He went toward the fireplace, holding a candle aloft and, in the round looking glass, saw himself, dirty and strange, his steel helmet askew. In that world, encircled by the looking glass, he had acted and reacted, had left his mark and had, in turn been marked. His bare knees had helped wear down the old Turkey carpet, battle ground of a thousand childhood games of Snap. From the gramophone, he had heard his first record. Over his mother's writing desk, the fierce stag still peered from a dark forest glade. But the picture which had hung beside it, a framed Raphael print, had fallen behind his father's bookcase. The looking glass room, unchanged since his childhood, had changed at last. This house is condemned. Condemned, the house was his. He could sleep in any bed he chose: he could break open the dining room sideboard and drink his father's port. (EofIC 248-9)

Only after the house's fate is sealed, and its end has approached, does Gavin feel free from the constrictions and rules that have shaped his life in it. In the final scene Gavin makes up with his father. He can forgive the man and forget his many deficiencies because the power balance has changed now. In this new and changed world, Gavin has completed his "rite de passage" (Craig 22), and "[h]is father was a child now" (EofIC 250), while the Black Angel and the White Angel have given way to a "grown-up voice" (EofIC 250).

This hopeful ending, which combines a revised relationship both towards his father and the space of the city – in this case represented by the microcosm of the house – exhibits parallels to the protagonist's development in *Fat Lad*. Like Gavin, the young Drew hates the city of his birth. While the former struggles especially against the restrictive inflexibility of Catholicism, the city's provincialism and its passivity, the latter sees Belfast's paralysis founded in the unresolved conflict and endless brutality. *Fat Lad* however juxtaposes this negative image against a more positive one of a city in the process of reinventing itself. In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, change is forced upon Belfast in the form of destruction. Thus Brian Moore's narrative remains in the Northern Irish tradition



of portraying the city in negative terms. He focuses on economic hardship, as suffered by the working-class population, and on the city's defunct society. Riddled by bigotry, restrictive traditions and a selfish anonymity that ultimately pits all individuals against each other, the city lacks an open and inclusive community. The few pockets of otherness that would bring a sense of heterogeneity and the possibility of openness remain largely hidden under the mainstream divisions of Belfast. This portrayal constitutes a major distinction between Patterson's contemporary novels and Moore's historical narrative. The earlier text does not exhibit the same fondness and sympathy for the inhabitants of Belfast. It does not portray a web of relations that constitutes the life and soul of the city, nor does it exhibit the same interest in multiple stories. In *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, Gavin remains the central focus, and the positive atmosphere of the novel results from Gavin's personal liberation of a restrictive social order and backward regime of Catholicism, enabled by the destruction of the city.

Thus, while certain parallels between *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* and the Belfast novels of Glenn Patterson can be constructed, the texts' essential differences concerning the treatment of the city and its social structure remain. Overall Brian Moore establishes Belfast as a dead and paralysed place that restricts the central character in his personal development. The social life of the city is portrayed crippled by bigotry and restrictive religiosity. "Moore's case against Belfast rests on his apprehension of the place as a backwater, where no progressive notion can ever take hold: stupefying and hamstringing its inhabitants at every turn, burdening them with suspect ideologies, dulling their perceptions, discouraging self-expression" (Craig 23). He especially criticises Catholicism<sup>75</sup> for its complete control of society. Change must be forced on Belfast in a violent and all-encompassing destruction. Ironically, it is the dead of the city that enable Gavin's future.

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<sup>75</sup> Foster comments perceptively that it is not religion itself, but the social restrictions of the church that are criticised: "What may be taken to task is the community's particular brand of Catholicism, but not its religion; its conservatism, but not its politics; its parochialism, but not its regional identity" ("Crisis and Ritual" 67).

### Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*

While negative images of Belfast proliferate in the prose literature of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Robert McLiam Wilson portrays the city in a more optimistic light. His novel *Eureka Street* aims for a balanced image of the city, in which positive and negative aspects exist alongside each other. Here, McLiam Wilson's goals might be very similar to those of Glenn Patterson, but his methods differ from the ones of his fellow Belfast writer. Where Patterson uses understated humour, McLiam Wilson drives his message home in a loud and sometimes crude satire. Where Patterson carefully limits the textual space he grants paramilitary organisations, McLiam Wilson lets his characters rant extensively and sarcastically about them. Where Patterson strives for urban realism, McLiam Wilson indulges in exaggeration. However, both authors share a fondness for the inhabitants of the city and focus very much on the social network made up of countless individual stories that constitutes Belfast. *Eureka Street* is a loving homage to the city and its people; a homage which was a long time in the making. "I'd always wanted to write a novel about Belfast since I'd thought of being a writer, and in that sense my first two novels were apprenticeships" ("Brilliant Joke" 79). The novel is dominated by the intertwining narratives of its two main characters, Jake Jackson and Chuckie Lurgan, but other voices also mix into Jake's first person narration and Chuckie's story, told by an unnamed third-person narrator, but who sounds a lot like Jake. In *Eureka Street* "a plethora of complex narratives and composite personal stories" (Laplace 164) complement each other. Already in its form the text demonstrates its postmodern celebration of fragmentation, heteroglossia and the rejection of fixed and binary structures.

Jake leads a slow and unfulfilled life in bourgeois Poetry Street, pining after the girlfriend who has left him. His work depresses him, and his colleagues' enthusiasm for it disgusts him. As a repossession team they comb Belfast's poorest working-class districts. Jake spends his spare time in the company of his "cheap friends" (*Eureka Street* 15).<sup>76</sup> Most prominently among them is Chuckie Lurgan, the only Protestant in the crowd. Forever unemployed and sharing a tiny

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<sup>76</sup> From now on abbreviated as 'ES' in parenthetical citations.

house on Eureka Street with his mother, on his thirtieth birthday Chuckie decides to change his life and become successful. A highly creative and very dodgy mail-order campaign that involves the false promise of giant dildos gets him his seed money, from which evolves an ever-growing and more and more ludicrous chain of businesses. Chuckie amasses improbable riches and becomes involved with an American woman. Max would have been out of Chuckie's league in his former life, but now she underlines his capitalist success. The two resolve to set up Jake with Max's flatmate Aoirghe. Unfortunately Aoirghe has strong nationalist views, something the politically exasperated Jake cannot abide. He hates the Northern Irish habit of slotting every detail of life within the same two binary categories and throughout his narrative lashes out against political activists of both sides. This provides a source of constant discord between him and Aoirghe. Meanwhile Chuckie and the now pregnant Max take their relationship to the next level. With their return from an emotional trip to the United States, Belfast turns into a city of romance. Jake and Aoirghe finally become a couple, and the novel ends with almost all minor characters in love alongside them. Their relationships break with conventions and bridge gaps, establishing the city as a place of heterogeneity and endless possibility. Thus a detailed and sympathetic portrayal of Belfast is interwoven with these stories of Jake and Chuckie. For Laura Pelaschiar the narrative "is, first of all, a crafted lyric and moving love-song for the city of Belfast and its people" (*Writing the North* 109).

However, Belfast's 'dark side' also features very prominently in *Eureka Street*. The reader can hardly turn a page without some kind of reminder of violence or political aggression. Glenn Patterson's novels do contain their fair share of the Troubles too, but overall they are much more muted in their allusions to it. Robert McLiam Wilson's narrative, in contrast, addresses the civil war directly on many occasions. For the novel's characters, encounters with army patrols, with the traces of sectarian violence and explosions, controlled or paramilitary, are part of their everyday Belfast lives. The conflict determines their behaviour and their movements in the city, and in many cases the novel is congruent with the worst images the world has of Belfast. Jake frequently worries about somehow betraying his religious confession to the wrong people. In a bar he

is “afraid of saying something too Catholic” (ES 2) to one bouncer, the one with the UVF tattoos, while on another night he does not speak to a different one, who has nationalist symbols painted on his forearms: “I was scared of not sounding Catholic enough” (ES 18). In his job, too, Jake has to constantly navigate a maze of social codes and behavioural norms in order to blend in with his workmates. When he does not succeed in hiding not only his religious persuasion but also his political sympathies for the peace process, he faces ridicule, abuse and threat. These encounters in *Eureka Street* are described as everyday occurrences, making clear how much the political instability determines life in Belfast. Certain “codes of conduct and inferences are first and foremost dictated by the city’s hierarchical and social constructions” (Laplace 165) and need to be observed when dealing with hardliners of both political ends, with the army, the police or simply an unknown person in the street.

The regular news of explosions, shootings and beatings form an almost integral part of the day (Farquharson 71), and nobody can escape the knowledge of it. Jake tries to literally shut the paramilitary brutality out of his life and turns off the radio whenever he hears a news bulletin, but he remains unsuccessful. Throughout the novel in a more or less similar scene he is not quick enough to switch off the news before hearing of death, bombs and guns. (ES 60, 91, 100, 159, 184, 201, 313). Violence has become an integral part of life in Belfast. Ironically, Jake would easily fit the image of a paramilitary enthusiast himself. Indeed, Robert McLiam Wilson asserts in an interview that Jake was intended as a satiric version of the reformed hardman, a stock character in many Troubles thrillers (“All Stories Are Love Stories” 76). Ridiculing the most popular Northern Irish literary genre, the author thus consciously writes against such a stereotypical representation of his country, its capital city and its citizens. Jake has grown up in a dysfunctional working-class family in west Belfast – “the internationally famous and dreaded West Side jungle” (ES 205). Having once made a living out of fighting, he is no stranger to violence himself. His jobs, first as a worker in the repossession business and then as a builder, put him in contact with many political hardliners and sympathisers of paramilitary groups. And yet, Jake defies all stereotypes by distancing himself from the political conflict in

every possible way. He distinguishes himself through his appearance, political convictions and intellect. *Eureka Street* portrays all low-level paramilitary activists and political extremists as idiots. “IRA, INLA, IPLO, UVF, UFF and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. A whole horde of dumb fucks with automatic weapons” (ES 64). He does not distinguish between any of the groups (nor, in this instance, between them and the police) but judges them all scathingly and without differentiation.

In a similar vein prominent personae are dealt with in *Eureka Street*. Jimmy Eve, leader of the Just Us party and Shague Ghintoss, national poet laureate, thinly veiled caricatures of Gerry Adams and Seamus Heaney, are heavily criticised and satirised in the novel (Bradford 229). Although Jake grants them intelligence, he accuses them of constructing a highly simplified and idealized Catholic version of their country for the outside world. Eve and his party work the propaganda machine in the US for their cause, ruthlessly profiting from American ignorance.

Just Us were triumphant. America didn't even know Protestants even existed. Many thought that Great Britain had actually invaded in 1969. [...]

It wasn't so much that real history was rewritten. Real history was deleted. Its place was taken by wild and improbable fictions. Ireland was the land of story and Just Us campaigners had always been the best storytellers. They told the world a simple story. They edited or failed to mention all the complicated, pluralistic, true details. It had always been thus and the world had always loved it. (ES 326)

In portraying these storytellers as charlatans the novel destabilizes this simplification of history, which distorts the country's complex reality and limits it to a single topic. The Americans are presented with a highly biased and instrumentalised story, which allows them to see Northern Ireland from one point of view only. Shague Ghintoss, according to Jake, is guilty of the same crime. In his poems he paints a picture of an Ireland of hedges and berries and flowers and spades, utilizing those markers of the rural for the mystification of an Irish national narrative; a narrative that has nothing to do with reality, but works brilliantly in setting one perceived people against another. “It was clear [...] that these were all nationalist hedges, republican berries, unProtestant flowers and

extremely Irish spades” (ES 175). Shague Ghintoss, just as Jimmy Eve, is portrayed as a calculating, professional nationalist, who knows exactly how he has to tell a story to make it work for his cause and his personal profit. “The people gathered close together, snug in their verse, their culture, they had one question. Why can’t Protestants do this? They asked themselves. What’s wrong with those funny people? Why aren’t they spiritual like us?” (ES 176) The novel clearly writes “against those reductive versions of identity and history that are easily manipulated by the ideologues in the service of particular social or political interests” (Kennedy-Andrews, *(De-)Constructing the North* 190). Jake’s contempt at Ghintoss’ poetry entails a critique on nationalism’s rural imagery, which completely excludes the city from a (Northern) Irish experience. As someone deeply entwined with the urban space of Belfast, Jake cannot tolerate this.

Unlike the audience at the reading, Jake and his friends do not believe in the essentialist religious distinctions the extremist political activists try to enforce with all means. They continually “trespass the boundaries that have been historically marked by Catholicism and Protestantism” (Agudo 89) and, in this instance, are thrown out of the poetry reading for questioning the ethical right of killing Protestants and for shouting ecumenical slogans. Aoirghe gets to hear Jake’s scathing views on the matter when she tells him she thought he was a Protestant.

“Why would you have thought that? The space between my eyes, the gapless front teeth, the fact that I’m wearing no green?”

I wasn’t exactly shouting but my voice was sharp. Some prick had once told me I looked like a Prod because I wore suits and had short hair. I had a low threshold for this stuff. In fact, I didn’t have any threshold for this stuff at all. (ES 95)

Chuckie, too, defies the notion of the two distinct communities. Coming from a Protestant working-class area of Belfast, Chuckie is the talk of his neighbours because he prides himself with an exclusively Catholic circle of friends (ES 136). Chuckie, in his teens part of a gang of loyalist sympathisers, opts out of the political perpetuum mobile of hatred after he has met the Pope. The encounter does not hold any religious qualities for Chuckie; he is simply overawed by the fame emanating from the man, mounting a photo of him in his house:

And from this a moderation was born in Chuckie. He was still only seventeen, and when some of his coarser faithmates heard of what he had placed on his wall, they judged him still young enough to take the meat of their schoolboy beatings. And amidst the biffings and bleatings and bleedings, Chuckie, who only defended the Man because he was famous, began to see an absurdity in this hatred, in this fear. Could it matter that the Pope was a Taig if the Pope was in the papers? (ES 31)

The lunacy of Chuckie's obsession with fame illustrates again how equally absurd and random it is to construct two communities according to religious persuasions. As the characters refuse to adhere to the rule of a homogenous circle of friends, they refuse to be a part of the ideological machinery of the Troubles that perpetuates an exclusive binarism, but they also distance themselves from the conflict in other ways. Physically the actual battlefields of the fighting seem far away from the worlds of Eureka and Poetry Street. Jake describes his part of town as resembling the tree-lined avenues of Cheltenham or Oxford (ES 13), not a zone of war. Jake is one of the many onlookers, one of the many commentators, but he is not a participant. Similarly, Chuckie's Protestant street has not witnessed any direct violence yet. Asked what he thinks of the war in his country, he is confused: "*What* war? No one he knew had been fighting" (ES 379).

The minutely described bomb blast of chapter eleven constitutes a violent intrusion in the otherwise relatively removed world of *Eureka Street*. The text makes it very clear that "the supreme value is the individual, not abstract causes" (Kennedy-Andrews, *(De-)Constructing the North* 194). Not the pretext for the violence but the enormity of human loss and its brutality becomes the central message, underlined by the narrator's heavy sarcasm:

It was notable, nevertheless, how many people still refused to understand what had happened. Several of the shocked onlookers sat staring dumbly at the excrement and tissue and blood, incapable of comprehending how political this was. One naive fireman, upon retrieving what seemed to be a portion of a severed head, naively believed this to have been a sadistic act. A woman with a bloody face who comforted her young son near the bookshop had no real conception of the historical imperatives leading to such an event. (ES 227)

The exact numbers and detailed descriptions of the mutilated bodies enforce this point of view further. While the dead are unknown characters, introduced only

shortly before the bomb goes off, it becomes very clear that their lives are forcefully cut short and bereft of a continued narrative by a violent and ultimately futile act. For the characters in *Eureka Street*, the Troubles are a pointless pursuit, which clings to a construction of difference that is no longer valid, because the distinctions of nationhood and religion between the two perceived peoples no longer apply.

[A]ny once-strong difference had long melted away and they resembled no one now as much as they resembled each other. The world saw this and mostly wondered, but round these parts folk were blind.

Interestingly enough, Protestant/Catholic hardmen would still routinely and joyfully beat the shit out of Catholics/Protestants even if those Catholics/Protestants didn't believe in God and had formally left their faith. It was intriguing to wonder what a bigot of one faith could object to in an atheist who was born into another. (ES 163-4)

The biting irony of the passage enforces “the depressing scenario of a conflict in which this unstoppable inertia is dangerously postponing the peace and stability so long demanded by the Northern Irish people” (Agudo 92).

Jake shares this frustration in the face of the senseless violence with a group that understand to express their dissatisfaction and anger much more effectively but, at the same time, much more subtly than the novel's protagonist. A number of “enigmatic fuckers” (ES 111), shrouded in mystery, paint Belfast's walls with the unknown acronym OTG. In a city where three-letter abbreviations are so omnipresent and potent, this introduction of a potentially new faction of the Troubles threatens to destabilize the bipolar division. While the population is intrigued, the various paramilitary groups feel threatened. Whatever it may mean, and whatever it may really try to achieve, OTG introduces new possibilities into a closed society. “It confounds the existing lines of sectarian demarcation by threatening the binary purity of the established terms of conflict” (Kennedy-Andrews, “Shadows of the Gunmen” 110). The old centres of power are challenged, and with OTG a third and new meaning quite literally becomes possible. It holds a mirror up to this closed society and unmasks its problems. “[I]t's entirely random. It could be any three letters of the alphabet. It doesn't really matter what they are. This is the city of the three-letter initial written on the



walls. I think someone is satirizing us” (ES 356). By satirising Northern Irish norms, the painters of OTG criticise them and demonstrate their opposition to the status-quo of society (Kirkland, “Bourgeois Redemptions” 229). Robert McLiam Wilson’s fiercely satirical novel does not propose any solutions, but “satire is never pointless. It makes us look stupid” (ES 356), and therefore aware of the constraining misconceptions in a society.

For all its biting criticism, the novel also exhibits great affection for Belfast’s inhabitants. “All stories are love stories” (ES 1): Thus begins *Eureka Street*, paying tribute to humanity and the idea of human relationships and showing their importance for every character. Lack of love is portrayed as something more terrible and much more frightening than the worst sectarian sentiments. Jake can bear the latter, but he is shocked by the ferocity of the former, when he speaks to a man during his repossession work. “His Catholic-hating smile hardened into a wife-hating smile, a much uglier thing” (ES 10). The characters in *Eureka Street* become more complete, more developed and more complex because they feel love. They turn into proper individuals. Jake realises this the moment he sees past Aoirghe’s shell of nationalist sentiment. “I hadn’t thought much about Aoirghe. I had pondered much on her politics and her bad attitude but I had not deeply considered her” (ES 291). In other words, politics, ideological concepts and sectarian hatred cannot determine a person, but they rather hide a human being underneath it. Peggy Lurgan’s homosexual relationship with her childhood friend turns her into a complex human being, and suddenly the adjectives *Protestant* and *working-class* no longer suffice to define her. Her individual identity emerges from a unifying and “[u]ncomplicated” (ES 341) society.

With all characters paired off, for Jake “Belfast felt like a city of love that night” (ES 358). It certainly is an unfamiliar literary image of Belfast, one that is very different from the paralysed and dull place of *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, the necropolis of *Resurrection Man*, the hardened city of *One by One in the Darkness* and even the less exuberant and more guarded optimism of Glenn Patterson’s novels. Such lyrical imagery resurfaces throughout *Eureka Street*. Jake’s night time stroll with a girl constitutes another example of it:

We took in the special streets with the nice trees and the big lamps. We walked by the river where everything could feel briefly eighteenth century.

The night was too good, too big and dark to believe. The weather broke and a light rain fell like retribution. She looked like a love song that night and my heart leapt in dumb, frantic syncopations. (ES 19)

The passage is ambiguous, and the reader cannot be sure whether Jake, in his last sentence, speaks of the girl or still of the city. But in a way this distinction becomes irrelevant. It shows how closely the material space and the social space are interrelated within the narrative. In *Eureka Street* the people of Belfast create the city, and thus the girl constitutes an integral part of it. Belfast's heterogeneous character is formed by its citizens' multiplicity, accommodating all their narratives on the one hand. On the other hand, it comes about in the meticulous portrayal of the city as an intricate and living structure. Names of places and streets Jake and Chuckie pass<sup>77</sup> are included in the novel to paint a detailed picture of Belfast that is extremely varied and heterogeneous (Tigges 186). In the 400 pages of the novel, Belfast becomes one of the most complex characters in *Eureka Street* (Pelaschiar, *Writing the North* 109), an assemblage of various aspects. It entails past, present and future in its materiality and the minds of its citizens. Jake's leafy, green, bourgeois Poetry Street (ES 10) stands in sharp contrast to the "Povertyland" (ES 63) he can just see from his upstairs windows. The west with the Shankill and the Falls areas constitutes the Belfast of TV reports. This is where most of the street fighting takes place and the riots have been breaking out. There is the industrial harbour telling old stories of the days of shipbuilding and other heavy industry. Chuckie's new haunts as a rich man, meanwhile, speak of a modern city that reinvents itself in redeveloped waterside bars and "Biergarten" spaces (ES 89). Peggy Lurgan recalls "fifties Belfast, buttoned-up, Presbyterian" (ES 370) – in her memory it is black and white like the photos she has kept – long before the conflict changed the face of the city.

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<sup>77</sup> Chuckie walks the length and breadth of his city, while Jake frequently drives his wreck aimlessly through Belfast, greedily taking in his hometown from his car. "It was a hugely shitty vehicle but it had incredibly clean windows. [...] I cleaned them every day so that I could see my city when I drove" (ES 16).

In *Eureka Street* the city can never be grasped in its entirety. Instead its numerous faces make it into a complex construct that takes skill to navigate. One moment you meet acquaintances on every street corner, the other you have to navigate your way through a plethora of potentially dangerous situations, passing skinheads, army patrols or abusive builders. In a description of Chuckie's Eureka Street the image of the city as an amalgamation of its people's stories is first painted. The narrator moves from house to house, providing the reader with a glimpse of their inhabitants, capturing their every action (ES 36). Every human being has a story and all the stories put together make up Belfast's soul, and turn it into a "living being" (Murphy 187) itself:

The city is a repository of narratives, of stories. Present tense, past tense or future. The city is a novel. Cities are simple things. They are conglomerations of people. Cities are complex things. They are the geographical and emotional distillations of whole nations. What makes a place a city has little to do with size. It has to do with the speed at which its citizens walk, the cut of their clothes, the sound of their shouts. (ES 215)

This paragraph captures the essence of the most lyrical passage in *Eureka Street*, placed literally in the centre of the novel. It is a declaration of love to "a place much filmed but little seen" (ES 215) and, above all, to its people. Its central metaphor of the city as text (Pelaschiar, "The City as Text" 184) gives the narrator the freedom to construct a Belfast of words in which its people, all the ordinary citizens which live ordinary, everyday lives, return from the periphery into the centre of the Belfast novel. It lays the power of change into the democratic hands of the majority rather than of politicians who, in the tangle of nationalist politics, do no longer see, or want to see, the mundane problems of the city.

The majority politics in Northern Ireland were not political. The citizens were too shy to give the grand name of principle to any of the things that they believed, but there were still things that they believed. And that peaceful majority spent its life keeping down jobs or failing to keep down jobs, buying washing-machines and houses and vacuum-cleaners and holidays and carry-cots. The way they were doing these things had changed the face of the city in the last ten years. Protestant areas were Protestant no longer. Working-class areas had become bourgeois. The city was moving outwards like a spreading stain. That was what cities did and that was what Chuckie, correctly or incorrectly, understood as politics. (ES 381)

Belfast becomes Laura Pelaschiar's 'Everycity', no different from its Irish and European neighbours. It changes and evolves with the rest of them, regardless of violent conflict which a minority keeps alive.

Robert McLiam Wilson paints a very warm and emotional picture of his hometown, portraying it as a victim of circumstances. In his novel the innocent city has been taken with force by the political extremists, has been abused and destroyed. Its people "live in a broken world – broken but beautiful" (ES 215). The dead, whose stories have been forcefully cut short by the violent conflict, present an absence within the city, a point which the narrator powerfully underlines in chapter eleven:

They all had stories. But they weren't short stories. They shouldn't have been short stories. They should each have been novels, profound, delightful novels, eight hundred pages and more. And not just the lives of the victims but the lives they touched, the networks of friendship and intimacy and relation that tied them to those they loved and who loved them, those they knew and who knew them. What great complexity. What richness. [...] The pages that follow are light with their loss. The text is less dense, the city is smaller. (ES 231)

An intricate web of individuals, their unique narratives multiply interlinked with each other, determines Belfast's pluralistic structure, in which every missing story, every missing link constitutes a loss and reduces the city's heterogeneity. The violence of the Troubles robs the city of its complexity, trying to reduce it to a one-dimensional narrative. *Eureka Street* rebels against this simplification and puts the individual stories at the centre. It emphasises the importance of rich relationships both for the individual and the functioning of a true community. Love constitutes the central theme in the novel, the ultimate force that drives the action. The opening sentence of the novel "gestures not only to the destinies of Chuckie and Jake, but perhaps more importantly, to the many extended descriptions of Belfast and its inhabitants" (Kirkland, "Bourgeois Redemptions" 215).

Robert McLiam Wilson's novel resembles Glenn Patterson's work in many regards. The most striking similarity lies in both authors' desire to depict a city characterised by more than the Troubles. They portray a heterogeneous and versatile space that can never be comprehended in its entirety. The social relates

closely to the material, and McLiam Wilson's text exhibits a fondness for Belfast's inhabitants even more outspokenly than Patterson's. In *Eureka Streets* he combines multiple stories and perspectives to form the urbanity. Here, differences in the implementation exist. Most noticeable is McLiam Wilson's heavy use of sarcasm that lathers Jake's voice in most of the many instances he talks about the political activists within Belfast and Northern Ireland. Like Patterson, McLiam Wilson writes against a constructed and simplifying dualism, although the Troubles are very much present throughout the novel. Again like Patterson, Wilson establishes most of his characters as onlookers rather than active figures within the conflict. Thus the Troubles remain largely separated from the character's personal stories and developments. These developments are signifiers of the change that takes place in the city, both on a social and material level. Chuckie's meteoric rise from an unemployed member of the working-class to a successful businessman counters the idea of static social order. Changes in the cityscape also feature in *Eureka Street*. The restaurants and bars Chuckie now frequents are new additions to Belfast. They point towards the future, while landmarks like the shipyards but also the recollections of Chuckie's mother introduce a historical perspective. Past, present and future combine when the city becomes a repository of narratives in which the shortened stories of the dead leave blank pages. This notion of the importance of remembrance can also be found in Glenn Patterson's text, most explicitly so in the closing paragraphs of *The International*. The textual analogy highlights once more McLiam Wilson's emphasis on the social dimension of the city, in which the individual is in close relationship to the community, becomes part of it, but also stands apart. Both Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson create a sense of humanity within their texts that remains exceptional in Belfast fiction.

### **David Park's *The Truth Commissioner***

*The Truth Commissioner* paints a much less optimistic and romanticised image of the city than *Eureka Street*. In the eyes of its protagonists Belfast remains haunted by its past. All efforts for renewal and positive change ultimately fail, as the Troubles still continue to pervade the city's character. The novel shares its central

issues of remembrance and “the role of memory in affecting the present” (McGuinness 332) not only with David Park’s other texts but also with Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was*. The two books are published in the early years of the new millennium, at a time when the first urge to represent a future-oriented cityscape seems to have given way to a renewed focus on the examination of the past.<sup>78</sup> Both texts show a Belfast that is on the road towards peace, but has not gained closure from the past yet, because too many questions remain unanswered. They address the notion that truth, if it existed at all, may forever be lost. In *That Which Was* Avery must accept that he will never know Larry’s story. In *The Truth Commissioner* the question of who murdered Connor Walshe remains disputed until the very end of the novel, as David Park conflates four perspectives into a narrative revolving around one unsolved case to be heard in front of the newly found Northern Irish Truth Commission. The two novels however differ substantially in their portrayal of Belfast. The accumulated perspectives of four protagonists deny the city its capability of change and progress in *The Truth Commissioner*. *That Which Was* on the other hand, just as any of Patterson’s novels, very much emphasises these defining aspects of Belfast and relates them to a positive representation of the city’s sociality. *The Truth Commissioner* excludes the social dimension of the city almost completely, as all four narratives centre very much on the respective main characters and their mental issues.

Henry Stanfield is the appointed truth commissioner presiding over the case of Connor Walshe, who disappeared during the height of the Troubles when he was 15 years old. He takes on the job for solely strategic reasons. “‘Truth Commissioner’ has a nice ring to it and its accompanying salary is almost as generous in its scope. Also in momentary truth, his career in recent years has stalled a little” (*The Truth Commissioner* 18).<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Stanfield’s estranged daughter Emma lives in Northern Ireland, and he secretly hopes for reconciliation. The idealistic ideals behind the Truth Commission do not play a role in his reasoning. The preamble he reads out before every hearing, which hails

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<sup>78</sup> It is worth repeating here that, after the wave of Belfast novels in the 1990s revising the urban imaginary, the intensity with which Belfast is treated in prose texts has diminished again. David Park is one of the few Northern Irish authors who, in his novels, keeps coming back to the city.

<sup>79</sup> From now on abbreviated as ‘TTC’ in parenthetical citations.

truth as a first step towards societal and individual healing (TTC 317), might explain the purpose of the institution, but it does not reflect Stanfield's sentiments. He feels nothing but contempt for society in Northern Ireland. He regards the country and its capital as an utter failure and remains opposed to Belfast for the duration of his stay. Stanfield does not immerse himself in the social space of the city. Instead, his life centres around his own needs, which he alleviates with good food as well as the easy sexual satisfaction and the bought admiration a prostitute can provide. Only Emma manages to penetrate his shield of self-confidence by continually rejecting him, and it is to appease her that he promises to treat the case of Connor Walshe with increased care. As it happens his own team has already found irregularities concerning Connor's file. Stanfield has done his best to downplay them before speaking to Emma, and quickly resorts to this old strategy again after he is blackmailed with compromising pictures.

Francis Gilroy has fought for decades, but now that he has achieved his goals, he feels tired. His job as newly appointed minister in charge of culture and children takes him out of his known world of West Belfast. The former paramilitary activist has taken part in the dirty protest in Long Kesh and fought against the RUC and the British army, but the alien and surreptitiously hostile environment of Stormont finally threatens to get the better of him. Every day he has to pass "under the aggressive defiance of Carson's statue with his outstretched arm which always makes Gilroy think the Unionist icon is giving him the finger" (TTC 88). Gilroy increasingly feels his age. As his only daughter's wedding is approaching, he becomes aware that he can no longer relate to the younger generation. In the end his call to appear in front of the Truth Commission to give testimony in the case of Connor Walshe comes almost as a relief, despite all of his and the nationalist network's efforts to keep his involvement in the disappearance hidden. Finally his struggle is over.

James Fenton has tried to distance himself from his old life, ever since he has been made to retire from his executive position at the RUC. He has turned his back on Belfast, searching for peace of mind in the mountains of Northern Ireland. His charity work and his yearly visits to a Romanian orphanage take him even further away from the grid of "human electricity" (TTC 124) that used to be

the city during the Troubles. But as he too is called in front of the Truth Commission, the memories of his meetings with Connor Walshe come back to him. He had used the 15-year-old as an informant before Connor was accused of touting and abducted by the IRA.

Finally, Michael Madden has made the most effort to leave the past behind him. Taking on a new identity, he has moved to Florida. But the life and family he has tried to build for himself burst like a bubble when men who know about his involvement with the IRA turn up and demand that he return to Northern Ireland to give evidence on the case of Connor Walshe in front of the Truth Commission.

At the hearing the construct of cover-ups and deception that has been upheld by various factions finally collapses. Fenton has to admit to using Connor as an informant. Madden refuses to go along with the story the IRA has given him. Instead he implicates Gilroy as Connor's killer. As the presiding chair Stanfield watches the case unravel and its irregularities revealed without him having to probe for them. He feels relieved that he is not forced into action, that the possibility of guilt has somehow bypassed him, while the other protagonists have to face theirs.

*The Truth Commissioner* portrays Belfast as a construct riddled by lies and deceit. Fenton especially sees the city as a murky pool of secrets. It is his job as a policeman to wrestle them from the urban bog, but in doing so he needs to resort to the same tactics he resents, and although Connor is no more than a child, he employs him as an informant. Fenton's contempt of Belfast finds expression on an outing with Connor at the landfill sites. "That's what we produce in this city, Connor – rubbish, mountains of rubbish. Great mountains of it" (TTC 150).

Metaphorically speaking, the deeds committed during the Troubles, the violence and the atrocities amount to just such a mountain of rubbish. Thus, after his career has come to an end, Fenton seeks to acquit himself of the city. The changes within the police force have brought a premature retirement for him, because he does not fit the newly cleaned image anymore that the PSNI is now eager to convey. Fenton, who has seen the worst of the civil war in a RUC uniform and would remain a constant reminder of the bad times to anyone working with him, cannot be part of the change that is going on in the force. Of



course he knows this, and the disrespectful way in which he has been paid off to leave early contributes to his own feelings of guilt and uncleanness. He seeks refuge in the mountains, trying to leave memories of his job and the wrongs he has witnessed and maybe also committed behind him.

He likes the mountains for their cleanness of air that fills the lungs and they feel purer than anything he's ever known after thirty years of sitting in offices and interrogation rooms laced with the sweet stench of sweat and fear; sitting in unmarked cars in clothes worn too long, with the stale taste of those hours when most of the city sleeps. Too long in offices hyped with human electricity and sour with the remnants of snatched food and dreg-filled coffee cups. He thinks, too, there is honesty in the mountains – they have no pretensions to prettiness but only a rugged bleakness and he likes their disdainful indifference to who, or what, he is. (TTC 124)

Fenton's desire for cleansing reaches its climax when he comes back from his trip to the Romanian orphanage. There he has befriended Florian, a boy similar in age to Connor when Fenton knew him. Florian longs for a life of possibilities and hides in Fenton's car in the hope of coming back to Northern Ireland with him. Fenton returns the teenager to the orphanage but cannot shrug off the feeling of guilt that he has not helped the boy. The episodes that describe his short acquaintance with Florian are interwoven with flashbacks of his meetings with Connor, drawing parallels to Fenton's behaviour now and then. In his mind he has failed once again to save a young life. Back home, Fenton turns to the sea in order to cleanse himself of these self-reproaches. "Taking off his clothes he walks into the sea, wading into the waves until it's round his waist then douses his hair and face, splashing great palmfuls of the darkness over himself. The cold takes his breath away but he forces himself to stay for a few minutes" (TTC 279). The description evokes images that go far beyond an ordinary bath or swim. Rather, Fenton undertakes a cleansing ritual, which in turn recalls the epigraph of *The Truth Commissioner*:

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in Hebrew tongue Bethesda having five porches.

In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.  
St John 5, 2-4

Fenton longs to be made whole by being rid of the disease of his past, in which he knows he has made mistakes. He longs for that what the Truth Commission promises to bring: Amnesty and closure, and ironically it is for exactly those reasons he does not want to appear in front of the chamber, but instead puts his hopes into the cleansing power of the sea. Fenton is not the only one to turn towards the water. Each of the characters in *The Truth Commissioner* is drawn towards it at some point in the narrative.

Struggling with the unfamiliar challenges of his new job, Francis Gilroy secretly dreams of a peaceful cottage by the sea in the west of Ireland. Even though Fenton and Gilroy have fought on opposite sides during the Troubles – the former as a member of the RUC and the latter as an active and high-up member of the IRA – they resemble each other closely. Like the policeman Gilroy belongs to the old brigade of fighters that is no longer needed within a changed society, and he too struggles with this realisation. Gilroy's skills and training are outdated and out of place in the new Belfast. Yet "[i]t's something he never forgets and something he struggles to make the youngsters understand – the need for vigilance, the constant need for caution. Struggles and fails" (TTC 68). Today a new set of skills is needed to survive in the political climate of Northern Ireland: that of words and modern technology. In Gilroy's eyes the people pulling the strings today are utterly inexperienced and untested:

"Probably nothing but kids who don't know anything about anything."  
"Except how to talk properly and look good in front of a camera. Who've got degrees coming out of their ears. Who've never had a single night's broken sleep or had to dirty their hand but who know how to write policies and do tricks with computers." (TTC 275)

Both Gilroy and Fenton resent the fact that the new generation does not feel gratitude for the work they have done, but rather sees them as an "embarrassment" (TTC 274). While Fenton has already affected his escape from the city, at least

partially, Gilroy is still hanging on to power and his old life. His neighbourhood in West Belfast represents a familiar safe haven from the challenges of the modern city, but it too has undergone changes he does not embrace. The drapes on his windows and the imposing four poster bed speak of his new position, to which his wife, in charge of the home, seems to have adjusted much more quickly than Gilroy himself. The part of the job that comes easiest to him lets him stay within familiar terrain, both physically and mentally. The party offices they use for head to head meetings with the constituents are housed in the nationalist heartland of the Falls Road area. The problems he has to deal with here do not force him to step into the unknown. "Gilroy has heard it all before, knows what to say, how to reassure, who to see and what can be done" (TTC 85). But even on home ground some changes in the attitude of society become apparent. "They pass the Bobby Sands mural. It has fresh graffiti on it. 'Bloody kids,' Sweeney says. 'There's no respect any more,' Gilroy says. 'Not for anything'" (TTC 84). The lack of respect undermines the legitimacy of 'the Cause' to which Gilroy has devoted his life. This development unsettles him and establishes him as a man of the past, cut off from changes in society. Experiencing this isolation causes Gilroy for the first time ever to doubt. He increasingly questions the existence of 'the Cause' and thus also the bipolar worldview he has held all his life. His daughter is soon to marry an English man. If he does not want to lose her, he needs to accept her choice and his soon to be son-in-law. He does not understand the young generation that is taking over his own party anymore. All these factors cause Gilbert to long for the security of the past, and at the same time also highlight his increasing doubts.

Something is happening to him. Maybe it's the menopause because he has read that it happens to men as well. He feels increasingly sentimental about things in a way that sometimes makes him feel vulnerable and foolish. [...] He tries to shake the moment away, stares at the wet prints of his feet and wonders what it has been all about. For the people? For Ireland? It is a strange thought but several times during the last few months he has been afflicted by the idea that Ireland does not exist. Like God it's just perhaps some concept that has no meaning apart from the one you construct in your head. He feels the shame of his thoughts, the traitorous serpent of doubt snaking through his lifetime of commitment, trying to undermine all that he has achieved. (TTC 81-2)

While the concept of Ireland loses its meaning in light of the modern urban and social developments that pass by Gilroy, the traditional folklore still exercises a certain power over him. The west of Ireland becomes the refuge of his dreams. There he could live a peaceful and straightforward life, untainted by the complexities of the city and the doubts that come with it.

But sometimes his mind begins to drift no matter how hard he tries to focus and he finds himself thinking of an escape, an adrenalin-fired break-out like that day from the Kesh. The west coast of Ireland, perhaps, where the only sounds in his ears are the throaty break of the surf and the only white is the jagged-tipped teeth of the waves and the scattering of gulls hovering weightless on the salted currents. (TTC 92)

Gilroy shares Fenton's attraction to a rural life. In this *The Truth Commissioner* picks up the Irish tradition of connoting the country positively and the city negatively. Both men prefer the simplicity of the rural to the complex network of action and reaction of the urban. Furthermore Gilroy's longing for a place in the west reflects nationalist beliefs that the real Ireland cannot be found in the urban centres but remains a prerogative of the removed Gaeltacht areas. Like Fenton, Gilroy looks towards the sea in the hope that it can return his belief and bring him peace of mind. The water is to heal him from the doubts that plague him.

The chosen means of transport provides a further indication of Gilroy's detachment from the city. He journeys across Belfast exclusively by car, isolated from life in the streets and the atmosphere of the modern capital. While in the end even the streets of his own neighbourhood "bring no sense of security" (TTC 348) anymore, the city centre is represented as a confusing jumble of impressions well before that. From the removed and moving perspective of the car window the city becomes an all-encompassing presence.

[Gilroy's] eyes stare blankly out of the car at the city which has almost drunk the day and finds its final dregs laced with a lingering sadness. It rises through the dusk and haloes the motionless heads of those travelling home on yellow-paned buses; it drifts aimlessly in the blurred slur of neon that skims the pavements and roads and brushes the pale faces of those whose hurried weariness reveals nothing but the imprint of their longing for home. Gilroy tries to look up beyond the frazzling network of neon, past the offices where moon-faced ghosts sit still frozen at computers, and tries to see the sky but the buildings are too close together, too

garishly dressed in their own light, like the young women who will link arms and claim these same streets in a matter of hours. (TTC 99)

The diverse sources of light represent the city as a confusing complex. This impression is supplemented by the melancholic atmosphere the quotation assembles. Negatively connoted words, such as 'aimlessly', 'pale', 'hurried weariness' or 'garishly' strongly affect the description. The artificiality of the urban architecture dominates the scene, eclipsing natural life. The fading light of day turns into artificial neon and the sky disappears. Belfast's inhabitants become anonymous as they move in great bulks around the city, their minds and hearts already longing to be somewhere else. The only people to enjoy the city scene is group of young women that self-assuredly claims the urban space as their own. They represent the new generation that unsettles and bewilders Gilroy. He cannot relate to the confident way in which they possess their city and fails to connect to the modern urbanity he witnesses from the car.

A description of the city in Stanfield's narrative includes a very similar observation, establishing the topics of generational change and isolation as themes that pervade the novel throughout its narrative. Reflecting Gilroy's perspective, Stanfield also regards Belfast from the isolated vantage point of a taxi:

The city looks unfamiliar, divested of its daytime features and dressed now in a hard neon sheen that lets it assume the anonymity of all cities at night. Yet as they get closer to the centre Stanfield tells himself it retains a distinctive tawdriness, the same working-class stigmata borne by cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool, and if it is superficially softened by new construction and the flattering glaze of glass and light, then he senses something primitive that still lurks just below the surface. Is it pure imagination, the fact that he has money in his pocket or simply that he is a stranger in a city at night creating the feeling of menace? His eyes follow a phalanx of arm-linked, bare-fleshed girls seemingly immune from the cold, only their raw sexuality worn as a coat as their high heels tap dance the pavement like a chorus line. A shifting, amorphous drift of young men in open-necked shirts thickens with undefined purpose. One of them holds a glass of beer in the air as a salute to female passers-by. Nestling on the railing of the City Hall huddles a ragged flock of Goths, black like crows. It feels like everywhere and nowhere but he tells himself that if he were to lower his window he would catch the sulphurous smell that curdles the air, as if a match has been struck, part of the latent sense of friction, the hard edge against which unexpectedly and unpredictably life might at any moment be struck in this city. (TTC 39-40)

Amidst this unsympathetic evaluation of Belfast the young women Gilroy imagines have already claimed the street. They represent the city's youthful inhabitants who populate the urban space and make up its nightlife. Like Gilroy, Stanfield cannot relate to this young generation, and he too remains an outsider to Belfast's social space as portrayed in the quotation. Patterson's fiction in contrast frequently emphasises the positive openness of Belfast's nightlife and welcomes the heterogeneous crowds appropriating the city. In *The Truth Commissioner*, however, the young girls mentioned in both quotations stand in stark contrast to the elderly, male protagonists, who struggle to come to terms with the changed urban society. Unlike generations of women before them, the girls do not restrict their lives to a domestic environment but actively claim their right to the city. The fact that these women appear in both Gilroy's and Stanfield's narratives emphasises the men's outdated view of society and of themselves within it. Both rely very much on their male dominance, but on very different levels. Gilroy understands himself as a man of action, who is able to protect his family, most notably his daughter, from the dangers of a hostile world. Stanfield sees himself as the benevolent but always superior teacher, who benevolently shares his vast knowledge and life experience with pretty women – of which “he's been grudgingly forced to admit that the city has its fair share. Sometimes if one meets his gaze he fantasises about stopping her and persuading her to join him in a restaurant more expensive than she's probably used to and advising her on the menu and explaining to her about wine” (TTC 252). Stanfield treats Belfast with much the same superiority and arrogance as he does the other gender, although in the case of the city he distinctly lacks affection. Driving through Belfast, he perceives the urban space as pallid and thoroughly uncultivated. In his eyes the changes affected within it have purely cosmetic effects but cannot cover Belfast's harsh, working-class nature, which on the one hand resembles that of other town centres, but on the other has retained a quality of unpredictability only to be found in this particular city. Stanfield imagines an ‘everycity’ interlaced with the negative attributes that have distinguished Belfast during the Troubles. The stereotypes he has acquired over the past 30 years have a pervasive influence on his perception. Stanfield comes to Northern Ireland with a fully-fledged opinion

of his renounced place of birth and its people, considering Belfast “much the same way say he might think of a piece of dirt that he hoped he had shaken off his shoe” (TTC 20). The process of installing a Truth Commission reminds him “of an old manged, flea-infested dog returning to inspect his own sick” (TTC 25). For him the people of Northern Ireland suffer the disease of memory. They will not let go of their dead and the many wrongs that have been committed during the Troubles. Ironically, regarding how derogatory Stanfield acts about this obsession with the past, he is just as vindictive of any attempts of renewal too. In his thorough dislike for Belfast, the commissioner dismisses any of the city’s attempts for change, whether this concerns the treatment of its past or its hopes for the future.

The curse of memory. Scabs on the soul. Even with most of his life behind him he thinks only of the future, of what can still be savoured. Of what experiences still await. He looks across the water and smiles. Nothing amuses him quite so much as the city’s gauche attempts to reinvent itself as a cosmopolis, nothing makes him smile more genuinely than to see its newest makeover. So on the other side of the river, in front of the wasteland of book depositories, tyre depots and warehouses, and on the water’s edge, sit some of the city’s more recent buildings, styled with features that echo Venetian palazzos but look as if they have been constructed out of a child’s building set. (TTC 23)

On the banks of the Lagan old and new buildings sit side by side. For Stanfield this synchronicity does not reflect a natural process of urbanity but is further evidence of Belfast’s inability to change. Unable to overcome his prejudices of the city, and constantly confronted with the horrors of the past, which patiently await his perusal as files on his desk, Stanfield cannot regard any aspect of Belfast in a positive light. The city’s moves to incorporate the past within a changed cityscape seem to especially rile him. In his eyes the attempts to turn historical failures into an asset are ridiculous, but to be expected in a place where “a ship that sank and an alcoholic footballer are considered holy icons” (TTC 38). Like in *Fat Lad*, the Titanic is stylised into the ultimate failure and because of this its commercialisation becomes risible in Stanfield’s eyes.

And already they are talking of restoring this place in the city’s favourite passion of self-consoling mythology. It will, no doubt, be a giant theme park where they will build a facsimile of the great ship, construct hotels and exhibitions, hope to bring in

the tourists from Japan, from America, from everywhere, for an exclusively virtual experience. It saddens Stanfield to think of the vulgarity that will be unleashed, the way he imagines this place will become the equivalent of some casino town in the Nevada desert. (TTC 22)

Adapting the city's historic sites to new purposes and adjusting to the needs of globalised tourism is at odds with Stanfield's backward image of the city. His disregard also entails all attempts of gentrification, although he himself lives in one of the newly built luxury apartments overlooking the river (TTC 20). This view is in fact the only aspect of the city Stanfield is drawn to again and again (TTC 51, 52, 55, 66, 248, 360). Sharing the other protagonists' affiliation to the water, Stanfield regularly looks down upon it after a long day at work, seeking consolation in the Lagan. The water as the symbol of the possibility of healing and acquittal is most pronounced in Stanfield's narrative. Because the headquarters of the Truth Commission reside along the banks of Belfast Lough, those who mourn their losses of the Troubles quite literally flock to the river, hoping for a cure for their grief.

The families of the victims have started to reclaim their dead and forgotten loved ones and given this brief moment of public restoration, they parade the chamber carrying portraits of their murdered relatives and candles that gutter in the wind tunnel of a street. [...] But there is no elegy played out in the increasingly elaborate rituals that grief has created, only a fractious, bitter stirring of the water to which people rush with earnest hope of healing. (TTC 247)

Ultimately the novel presents the Truth Commission as a failed attempt to bring closure to Northern Ireland. There is no cure for memory, but past deeds will continue to reverberate in the present. These sentiments echo the central theme of remembrance in *That Which Was*, where Avery is forced to come to the same conclusion. For all his cynicism Stanfield sees clearly that the desire for truth, regarded as such an important step for healing, cannot be fulfilled, and "he understands that sometimes the angel troubling the water might only darken the swirling pool of the past" (TTC 368-9). Rather than seeing change as a continuation of history, Stanfield interprets the developments of the city as a desire for a new beginning and knows that this is not possible. Northern Irish



society cannot start afresh, but the scars caused by the Troubles will remain. They might fade in time, but healing is not possible.

This is also something that Michael Madden comes to experience. Plagued by memories of the past Madden seeks the calming influence of the lake next to his apartment, the water again playing a crucial role in the symbolism. He goes there seeking forgetfulness and healing from his former past. “At first he had forced himself back into sleep but each time that was when the dreams had come, so now as soon as he wakes, he gets up and goes outside to the lake, the lake where each morning he watches the light strengthen and shape the coming day” (TTC 180). But just as a new beginning seems possible with his pregnant fiancée, the Truth Commission mocks Madden’s efforts at escaping the past. He must return to both the time and the place he has run from for so long and confront his underlying guilt. For Madden Belfast represents a closed space. After the openness in the US he experiences the narrowness of its architecture as restrictive. In Florida he “likes the disconnection, the arbitrary piecemeal nature of it all, the way nothing is pushed tight against its neighbour, the way there’s space to breathe between the boundaries and no one has to live inside the pocket of someone else’s paranoia” (TTC 208). The eternal sunshine in Florida forms a stark contrast to the melancholic greyness of Belfast. The positive present is pitted against the negative past. “He suddenly realises that it’s winter and without being able to stop it he thinks of what it must be like back there – the grey slant of rain, the raw-edged wind gnawing through the tight funnel of streets – and he shivers” (TTC 206). Just as in Gilroy’s narrative, the sky is no longer visible in this image of Belfast. The city remains lodged in Madden’s memory as a harsh and closed place. When he finally returns to Northern Ireland, his first impressions confirm his recollections. Similarly to Stanfield, Madden comes to Belfast with a fully formed picture of the city in the past and finds it verified in the present. His unwillingness to return and the emotions tied up with the actual experience of the city underline the subjectivity of Madden’s perception.

He nods and looks out of the window and he doesn’t know what’s changed like Lynch kept saying because everything he sees and everything he feels about this place remains exactly as he remembered it. [...]

Everywhere he looks seems like it's printed in monochrome, the roads and streets so narrow that after a while they feel as if they're tightening round his throat, the ligature cutting off his breath. In the car, with the smoke and the proximity of Lynch, he feels the choking press of his former world where instead of light and sky there is only an unbroken stretch of grey squeezing out the smallest possibility of colour. (TTC 293)

After years of absence, Belfast strikes Madden as unchanged, as feelings of restriction and being trapped in the too narrow cityscape well up inside him again. The depressing description of the city directly relates to Madden's experiences in it. At the age of 19 he becomes involved in the civil war, until he finally plays a minor role in the abduction of Connor Walshe. Because Madden's thoughts constantly linger on the traumatic experiences of the past, his imagination cannot overcome the city he associates with his former life. Unlike Drew in *Fat Lad*, Madden never learns to see a transformed Belfast, because he does not believe in its ability to change. His personal history tightly caught up with the city's character, Madden suffers the restrictions of his guilt and transfers them to the urban space. "The car journeys along roads he doesn't want to remember and sometimes it feels as if the different shop fronts are laughing at him, so in his head he endures their jeers as they vent their spite and reach out to reclaim him" (TTC 293). Blatant signs of transformation become insignificant, as deeply lodged images of the past superimpose themselves over the material reality. Even after Madden has confessed his secret, the guilt he feels and the memory of the events still haunts him. Accordingly, no reconciliation with the city is possible.

And he longs for that unravelling ribbon of houses and businesses, those disconnected places where everything exists in its own space and nothing has to overlap or cramp into lives that endlessly intertwine until they rub each other raw. The world he sees from the taxi is small and bitter like the tight clench of a child's fist and he wants to be gone from its reach and never come back so when they begin to climb out of the city he doesn't look back. (TTC 351)

Thus in this last narrative once again an image of a former Belfast covers the city's present, emphasising the lasting and defining effects of the past. Madden cannot free himself from his experiences and invariably relates them to the place in which they happened. This picture remains so strong that no revision is possible. Madden very clearly blames the physicality of the city, the narrowness

of its streets and the limited space available to its communities as well as its depressing appearance. By examining the role of memory and remembrance in the imagination of urban space, the narratives of *The Truth Commissioner* presents Belfast's spatiality not only as inherently constituted by the actions that take place in it, but also as constitutive of them.

Establishing it as an active component of the narrative, the novel describes the city as a strong influence on its characters. Nevertheless the categories of the spatial, the social and the historical are not as elaborately constructed as in Patterson's novels. While Belfast's material topography plays a role in all four narratives, the social dimension becomes most apparent in Gilroy's and Stanfield's journeys through the city. However, the novel focuses not on a social network but on the isolation of each of its protagonists. None of them appears as an integral part of city life, but instead they retain an outside perspective on Belfast throughout the text. Here lies the biggest distinction between Glenn Patterson's novels and *The Truth Commissioner*. Patterson establishes the heterogeneity of his city through a network of interconnected stories, interlacing them in intricate social networks and using them to trace Belfast's transformations through time and perspective. David Park on the other hand uses the technique of multifocal narration to emphasise one image of the city that has gotten stuck in the past. His characters are all out of sync with time and place. Unable or unwilling to keep up with a changing society, they remain left behind, lingering in a place defined by its past. The central focus on the impact of the memory introduces a historical dimension. Especially Fenton and Madden, but also Gilroy in his recollections of more straightforward times, conjure up images of Belfast during the Troubles. An element of juxtaposition exists between the city during the worst of the violence and the modern urbanity on its way to peace. However, negative images dominate for the greatest part of the novel. Because of the bitter and cynical perspectives of the novel's four protagonists, Belfast in *The Truth Commissioner* is portrayed as restrictive and provincial, as obsessed with the past and therefore unable to change. Thus David Park's novel, although sharing central ideas and concerns with *That Which Was*, differs essentially from the work of

Patterson, which on the whole depicts the city in much more positive and flexible terms.

### **Conclusion: Comparative Perspectives**

The above analysis of three very different novels emphasises Patterson's unique position within the tradition of Belfast's literary representation. In his work he consistently conjures up an image of a heterogeneous and multidimensional city. As I have shown, its material spatiality, its historicity and the social spectrum existing and acting within it, determine it as an urban space that is constantly developing and changing. This dynamic and active image of Belfast and Patterson's preoccupation with it throughout his body of work remains exceptional in Northern Irish literature. Brian Moore's *Emperor of Ice-Cream*, the last of the Belfast novels by an author whose work is often regarded as the starting point for "fiction of serious merit" (Magennis 15) to come out of Northern Ireland, can stand exemplary for the vast majority of novels that, over the course of the last century, have portrayed Belfast as provincial, deeply divided and unchanging. Whether the emphasis lies on social restrictions, economic hardship or the paralysing influence of the sectarian violence after 1969, the representations of Belfast conjured up in these texts have remained overwhelmingly negative.

For generations Belfast has been viewed in various intellectual and artistic circles as anathema to the creative spirit. Live there and perish. The shocking, unflattering images of the city in Brian Moore's novels *The Feast of Lupercal* and *The Emperor of Ice Cream* feature Belfast as a desperate place, thwarting human affection, self-confidence and hope. (Dawe, "The Revenges of the Heart" 204)

Only the 1990s bring a revision of this imagery. It is in this decade that Glenn Patterson establishes himself as an important voice in Northern Irish literature and develops his lasting focus on the city as a living complex. He comes to be an important representative of a new generation of writers, and his novels are increasingly subjected to academic scrutiny. Numerous comparisons attest Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson the similar goal of updating the fictional map of the city. In congruence to this my analysis reveals similarities in the positive representation of the city, its heterogeneity and its emphasis on the social dimension between *Eureka Street* and Glenn Patterson's novels. Overall,

however, the urge for such a representation is quite short-lived and diminishes again with the start of the new decade. *Eureka Street* remains Robert McLiam Wilson's last published novel to date, while some writers, such as Deirdre Madden, turn towards different topics altogether. Still others return to the past and continue to include the Troubles as a pervasive influence on the representation of the city. In Lucy Caldwell's novel *Where They Were Missed* (2006), for example, the protagonist revisits the working-class Belfast of her childhood in the 1980s, remembering Orange marches and sectarianism. In *The Truth Commissioner* David Park too plays with the theme of memory. The city he depicts in his novel cannot rid itself from its violent and inhibiting past. It remains cold, hopeless and unchanging. The differences in the urban representation in comparison to Glenn Patterson's novels, especially *That Which Was*, become apparent in my analysis. Thus Glenn Patterson's body of work and its literary representation of Belfast remain unique in the tradition of the Northern Irish novel, because he continuously attributes his textual city with a positive complexity, flexibility and contemporariness unrivalled by other publications. This preoccupation with the idea of the city, its spatiality, historicity and sociality spans Patterson's entire work.

### **Conclusion: Glenn Patterson's Belfast**

I have shown these major focal points in my major analysis of four of Patterson's novels. The texts intensely engage with urbanity, specifically that of the Northern Irish capital, establishing its multi-facetedness again and again. Heralded as the new Belfast novel of the 1990s, *Fat Lad* has made for an excellent starting point of my exploration. The novel first established the writer as chronicler of his home city. At the time of its publication Patten called "Patterson's version of Belfast [...] the most legitimate and resonant to have appeared in recent fiction" ("A Platform for Departure" 31). This image has further developed in the subsequent novels *The International*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was*, all of which are firmly set in the urban environment in Belfast. Additionally, his journalistic writing, as collected in *Lapsed Protestant* and quoted repeatedly throughout this thesis, often deals with related topics. However, these books do not represent all of Glenn Patterson's novelistic output. Thus, in order for me to be able to claim that his extraordinary vision and multi-dimensional representation of the city spans the entire body of his fictional work, it is at this point necessary to include a short discussion of *Burning Your Own*, *Big Night at Black Thunder Mountain* and *The Third Party*. I do not cover these in my main analysis, which centres on the representation of Belfast, for several reasons. The first text I regard as an opening work set in Belfast, but without the clear agenda of re-mapping the city that clearly evolves in *Fat Lad* and continues in the Belfast novels that follow. The latter two are not set in Belfast but include very international settings.

*Burning Your Own* was published in 1989 and tells the story of Mal Martin's intense relationship to Francy Hagan in the summer of 1969. Set in Larkview, a fictional housing estate modelled on parts of Finaghy in the south of Belfast, the text utilises the rising tensions within Northern Ireland to create a heated and frantic atmosphere. Already this early text deals with some questions of space and place, putting special emphasis on Larkview's material construction and its social network.

*Big Night at Black Thunder Mountain* (1995) chronologically slots in between *Fat Lad* and *The International* and, unlike both of these books, leaves

Belfast at least partly behind to explore a much more artificial urbanity. Set in the massive construction site of Euro Disney, it again pays attention to the materiality of a man-made world, but also explores very diverse centres of urbanity such as Paris, Berlin or Los Angeles at various stages in history.

Finally, Patterson's last publication to date again explores new terrain. *The Third Party* appeared in 2007 and follows a Northern Irish businessman on a trip to the Japanese city of Hiroshima. As the protagonist becomes acquainted with a fellow countryman and writer who attends a literary conference entitled 'Writing Out of Conflict', parallels between the cities of Belfast and Hiroshima are quickly established. *The Third Party* explores Japanese urban space from an outsider's perspective, the main characters experiencing the city as tourists and flaneurs.

All three novels deal with issues of the urban. Thus it can be said that Patterson's work continuously oscillates around central elements of spatiality. City life and its repercussions for the people experiencing it have strongly influenced Patterson's narratives from the very start of his writing career until the present day. Of course his interests have broadened and evolved, but the urban characteristics I have identified in my analysis can be found in all of his novels, and while he has chosen international settings for both *Big Night at Black Thunder Mountain* and *The Third Party*, he has not cut his ties with the central setting of most of his other books completely. Belfast still features in both novels, acting as stepping stone and origin for some major characters.

In contrast to these more international perspectives, the protagonist's universe in *Burning Your Own* is firmly centred on his immediate neighbourhood. Eight-year-old Mal Martin has only recently moved to Larkview with his parents. The family struggles because the father has become unemployed and increasingly drifts off into alcoholism. The atmosphere in the house is just as tense as in the streets outside. The Twelfth Fortnight approaches and the youths of the primarily Protestant estate feverishly prepare the bonfire and practise for the Orange Parades. Larkview's older boys uphold a strict hierarchy and keep the younger children in check by intimating and bullying them. Mal finds it hard to integrate himself into this system. Not only is he one of the smallest, but his role as the newcomer and his father's precarious situation make him an easy target. Both he

and his parents feel the social pressure to adapt to Larkview's way of life, as the already tight-knit community bands even closer together in the light of rising sectarian tensions. In opposition to this forced conformism stands the generally despised figure of Francy Hagan. "Francy was hated *because* he wouldn't join in, not the other way round" (BYO 113). The Catholic teenager has created an alternative world order on the dump bordering the estate. Treated as an outcast by everybody, he appears physically repulsive and wild. However, his opinions of the hostile world outside the dump keep Mal, who starts to befriend him, spellbound and constitute perceptive comments on the development of their urban surroundings. From the very start of the novel Francy puts emphasis on the materiality of the estate. The opening sentence of *Burning Your Own* not only establishes Francy as major character, it also already establishes the physical setting as an important factor of the narrative. "'In the beginning' – said Francy – 'was the dump'" (BYO 3). Viewed from the stretch of wasteland Francy has appropriated as his, the known world of Larkview disintegrates before Mal's eyes. All of a sudden, what he has taken as a given contorts into a "redbricked disorder" of which he would "never have believed it could look like that" (BYO 14). The dump provides an alternative perspective. It represents "a zone of temporary ambivalence, even possibility" (Goodby 237), which introduces flexibility to the young boy's world view. Mal's belief in the stability and permanence of Larkview's order is further upset, because Francy points out the constructedness of the very materiality of the estate.

That was the first estate, you know: a compound of diggers, bulldozers, braziers, planks and bricks. Those houses out there all started off in here, every one of them – a million fucking pieces. And there were people of course, the workmen [...]. Hundreds of them. And they'd be out sometimes in the winter before the fucking sun was right up. Day in, day out, week after week, for months on end, they dug up earth, put down foundations, put down pipes, connected mains and cables, churned cement in hand-turned mixers, laid bricks, battened floors, framed doors, wired up, roofed in and planed off, until the whole fucking lot was finished. Out of nothing from this compound they raised an estate: streets, roads, parks, avenues, drives, cul-de-sacs; houses, detached and semi-detached, on the high ground at the front, terraced row upon terraced row down here at the back. And all in the same time that it takes to make a baby, dipping to dropping. (BYO 15-6)



This quote establishes the estate as a man-made environment, built according to a specific plan and for a specific purpose. The detailed listing of the material components Larkview is constructed from emphasises the physicality of the place, as do Mal's repeated descriptions of the layout of the estate, or his parents' complaints about the quality of their house (190). Life enters this materiality in two ways. Firstly, in the last sentence of the quote Francy compares the process of building to the growing of a baby and thus equates the urban environment to a human being. Secondly Francy supplements his description of Larkview's construction with one of its peopling. "The builders slipped unnoticed through the back here, while the people, owners of the houses they'd made, entered the estate by the front. And fuck did the people ever come. Can you imagine it?" (BYO 17) This is followed by an extensive list of place names. Francy begins with other areas within the city, rattling off distinctively Belfast names such as Newtownards Road, Ardoyne, Legoniel, Ormeau, the Village, the Shankill, the Falls and Whiterock Road (BYO 17). He moves on to neighbouring towns of Lisburn, Larne or Downpatrick and finally includes places from all over the world:

They felt the tug: felt it in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, London; felt it in Toronto, Chicago, New York, Detroit, Wellington, Sydney, Perth and places whose names you've never in your life dreamed of. They felt the tug, like they all do eventually, and were drawn back to Belfast, to a space less than Belfast: an area of a quarter square mile, a collection of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses, in a network of avenues, parks, cul-de-sacs, roads and streets, raised from nothing out of the fields in the time it takes to make a baby; bounded by main roads on three sides and by a poxy wood, trailing into a dump, at its arse end. (BYO 17-8)

Rather than establishing the roots of Larkview's inhabitants within the estate itself, Francy emphasises the varied routes by which the people have arrived in the neighbourhood. He opens up the "ready-made community" (BYO 20) and portrays Larkview as a "place of diversity" (Parker, *Northern Irish Literature* 128), investing its society with a heterogeneous background that Mal previously could not see. On the one hand this varied conglomeration of people characterises the estate. On the other hand the physical layout gives it its form as well. Francy highlights both the material and social components of the urban

setting. This conception of the city is echoed repeatedly in the narrative. The evening of the bonfire sees all neighbours joining to watch the event (BYO 91). Listing their names minutely, Mal perceives them as a number of individuals.

The precise, almost pedantic, process of naming here is characteristic of the manner in which Patterson seeks to establish an authenticity which has been erased in other readings of Northern Irish society. The community which is elsewhere perceived as ideologically and culturally homogeneous is renegotiated as a conglomeration of distinct personalities. (Patten, "Fiction in Conflict" 140)

At the same time Mal is very much aware of this sense of togetherness that transcends confessional boundaries. Just as the people moving to Larkview have come from the Falls area as well as the Shankill, Protestant as well as Catholic families are now drawn towards the fire, despite the mounting tension in the city.

For a large part of the narrative the violence that erupts between Belfast's citizens remains removed from the estate, and although Mal experiences consequences of the civil unrest, it is only when he leaves Larkview for his uncle's house that he becomes aware of the dimensions of the violence. While his perspective in Larkview remains limited within the borders of the estate, he now realises the interconnections that exist between the many individual places the city entails. This sense of the city as a network is already expressed on the journey towards the house (BYO 100), but it becomes most apparent when the position of the house affords him a bird's eye's view over Belfast.

[...] [T]he air shimmered and Belfast stretched out before him like a mirage. He gazed into the valley again. Dazzled, he saw the city dance before his eyes in a thousand broken shapes and he shuddered, so that the backs of his thighs were set trembling, and he took a step back lest he topple headlong from his perch. He seized upon the giant staple of Goliath, the shipyard crane, and gradually stared the city into focus, harmonious between the hills. (BYO 102)

In this image the iconic yellow crane gives Belfast its character, bringing the different pieces together into a harmonious look. This surreally distorted but mesmerizing picture of the city as a whole is supplemented by Mal's repeated ponderings of the view, in which he gradually dissects it again into a conglomeration of places.

His eyes could still distinguish only the outlines of areas and the vague shapes of buildings, but his imagination now supplemented this with detail gleaned from the fragments he saw night by night on the television screen. He constructed actual streets and peopled them with real individuals, whose lives and actions had bearing on his own. What they did – and didn't do – was of importance to him, of importance to everyone. If they could only see the city from where he saw it, could see how it was linked, built up, each part depending on the others, they wouldn't cause trouble anywhere, knowing that if they did they put everything at risk. (BYO 115)

Mal recognises the city as a material as well as a social network. Buildings, streets and neighbourhoods lead into each other. Their inhabitants act and react within this environment and thus influence both the physical space they live in and the society they are part of. Mal sees his own connection to the city and its people, establishing himself and the individuals he imagines as part of a living, urban network. The erupting Troubles invariably influence this urban complex even as early as 1969. Already in his first novel Patterson seeks to point towards the impact of the sectarian conflict without establishing it as all-encompassing. As an impressionable eight-year-old Mal of course gets borne along with sectarian sentiment, but at the same time remains remarkably neutral in his judgement. He befriends the “mad Taig bastard” (BYO 8) Francy and declares his allegiance towards him openly and in front of the aggravated estate. He also distinguishes clearly between the troublemakers he sees on TV and the ordinary people he grows up with, although this important difference becomes increasingly lost in the tense atmosphere of the summer. “All Rebels were Catholics, but not all Catholics were Rebels” (BYO 176). In this context, Francy definitely poses the most difficult challenge of categorisation, because for the overwhelming majority of Larkview's people

Francy was something more than just a Catholic; he was a Rebel and a Taig.

A Rebel and a Taig. The words had no history in Mal's mind. They had been coined for Civil Rights marchers and student demonstrators; coined for rioters in Londonderry, Dungannon and Armagh, places Mal had never been; coined for John Hume and Gerry Fitt, Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann, faces on TV. Why, then, for Francy Hagan? Because he sat on a toilet and not a seat, in a filthy dump infested with rats? (BYO 24)

Ultimately Francy aggravates through his unyielding individualism. While Mal and his parents desperately try to become a part of Larkview community and throw their own convictions overboard for it (BYO 189), the teenager is not prepared to lose his identity. Instead he constructs an alternative world to the estate, which is dominated by strict social conventions. In Francy's dump "their rules' – he jerked a thumb vaguely over his shoulder – 'stop at the fence'" (BYO 61). With Francy, no 'us' and 'them' exists, and it is the boy most and foremost who challenges the binarism of Catholic and Protestant in *Burning Your Own*. The hatred for him transcends categories. "No one liked Francy Hagan. And clearly it wasn't simply because he was a Catholic" (BYO 23). At a young age he is bullied by "my own sort, not yours" (BYO 226), as the Catholic children chase him. Throughout the narrative Francy completely and utterly rejects the binary categorisation of Belfast's society, exposing it as random und ultimately senseless. "'They tell you one thing one day and something else altogether the next. Fucking beans means Heinz now.' [...] 'All you can ever be sure,' Francy went on, 'is that whatever the other sort likes, you're supposed to hate'" (BYO 217). Francy displaces dominant binaries and subjects them to "an open play about difference and meaning" (Schneider 61). His message remains unheard in the tense atmosphere of 1969 and Francy does not survive the summer. His attitude however, and his understanding of the place he lives in, reappears in Patterson's other novels. The deconstruction of binary oppositions, even against the pervasive social constructs, and the persevering desire for individualism can be found to a larger or lesser extent in all the novels I have analysed in the main part of this thesis. Correspondingly the focus on the materiality as well as social network of the city that form such an important part of Patterson's urban representation can already be made out in his very first novel.

Francy especially highlights the city (or, in the case of *Burning Your Own*, Larkview) as a man-made construct, and this aspect of urbanity reappears with full force in *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*. One day and one night provide the temporal frame for the novel, in which the young American and apparent Disney enthusiast Sam caves in to his delusions and paranoia and kidnaps two

workers at the Euro Disney construction site near Paris, threatening to blow up the half-finished Big Thunder Mountain. Canteen employee Ilse and builder Raymond spend hours of fear tied to their kidnapper, wavering between the imminent danger of death on the one hand and dependence on and sometimes even understanding for Sam on the other hand. Gradually the novel traces the routes by which Sam, Ilse and Raymond have found their way to their present situation, incorporating urban life in cities as diverse as Los Angeles, Belfast, Paris, Stuttgart and Berlin into the text. *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* features a poly-vocal narrative. As in *The International*, *Fat Lad* and *Number 5* Patterson utilises this narrative technique to include different perspectives into the novel and to establish a potpourri of heterogeneous experiences and cities. “I wanted to bring together as many experiences as possible, because it increasingly seemed to me that we needed to bombard our [Northern Irish] narrative with as many other narratives and story lines as possible” (Patterson, *Writing the Troubles* 17). Thus, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* amalgamates a number of stories, but it also “resists fixity” (Parker, “Books of Hours” 11). The major setting of Euro Disney emphasises a preoccupation with (urban) space on a more abstract and conceptual level, and the novel concludes with a short description of Walt Disney’s fantasies, who “ended [his life] making plans for the city of tomorrow” (BN 207). Disneyland originated as EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), which Disney

said would have no slums and no landowners and therefore no voting control (other than his own) and though he died long before building had begun the rumour was he had himself put on ice, frozen against the day when a cure could be found for all his ills and he would return like the risen urban saviour to the ideal city  
Only the ideal city was never built (BN 208)

Instead the plans were modified into a Disney theme park. Patterson uses this setting to play out the contrasts between the ideal and highly conceptualised urban environment Walt Disney fantasised about and actual cities, grown over centuries and shaped organically by their inhabitants. The impression that even Euro Disney for all its planning can never be perfect is established very early on in the novel. The people building the place invariably influence the space, bringing a sense of

improvisation and the positive chaos of a human network with them. At construction stage the artificiality of the theme park is overridden by the makeshift layout the workers give the place. This becomes notable in the “lanes and alleys that had grown up between the company lots. Some of these had names scrawled on bit of wood stuck in the ground. O’Connell Street, Sauchiehall Street, Scheiss Strasse, Piccadilly Circus” (BN22). The hastily fabricated and improvised signs illuminate the progress of construction on the one hand. On the other they establish the influence of its inhabitants on the place and show that space is intrinsically and clearly shaped by the people occupying it, no matter how strictly planned the materiality is. The mixture of existing and made-up street names in various languages together with a number of national flags flown from the huts speaks of a very international work force that has formed a temporary community under the unifying image of Mickey Mouse. The cartoon character “was what held it all together. The castle, the mountain, the labyrinth, the fort, the riverboats and railroads, the town square, the Bazar, Autopia and Videopolis, the Past and the Future. He was as real as royalty” (BN 15). With this *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* accentuates the possibility of heterogeneity in a community. In the novel Euro Disney constitutes a remarkable hybrid. It is an artificial place planned to perfection and made mystical by the all-encompassing presence of Disney’s most successful imagination. But it is also a clearly improvised place, coloured in the texts by its utter constructedness and temporariness. For every worker urgently feels that the Euro Disney they occupy at the moment is a version in change, because they themselves affect it. The ramshackle streets and huts will not last, but give way to new buildings. By choosing to set his novel in this transitory moment in the history of Euro Disney Patterson emphasises the nature of urban spaces (for Euro Disney in this novel acts as a city in its own right) as constantly evolving complexes, progressing through time as well as with and because of its inhabitants. The representation of the artificial city is complemented by descriptions of existing ones. A great number are mentioned throughout the narratives. Next to contemporary names, such as Glasgow, Leeds (BN 53), Philadelphia (BN 74), or Los Angeles (BN 154), stand biblical and mythical names, such as Jericho (BN 6), Pithom and Raamses (BN epigraph) or the City of

the Dead in Egypt (BN 61). These numerous references highlight again Patterson's preoccupation with the abstract idea of the urban in general that finds its beginning in the very first city.

(For centuries, perhaps, a clabber of huts on an island in a river till  
*Ziggurat!* – a turning point: base earth aspired to heaven – Ur becomes urban.  
The pattern sets.) (BN 32)

This pattern is executed throughout time in metropolises throughout the world. As in his other novels Patterson points out universal characteristics of urbanity. He stresses the constant change that affects all cities and the social make-up they are composed of. Patterson himself states about the idea behind *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*: "It's going to be about cities, about how cities work, and that's something I've been interested in ever since seeing Berlin" (Hicks 114). In the text Ilse's memories of this city and Stuttgart, Raymond's recollections of Belfast and Sam's experiences in Paris paint images of living and evolving complexes.

Ilse grows up in a city recovering from World War II. During her childhood Stuttgart slowly changes from a ramshackle place, "a city of gaps and holes" (BN58), to a modern urban place, in which "[m]ore and more buildings appeared, stopping the gaps in the Stuttgart streets" (BN 60). As a child of the postwar period, Ilse's understanding of the city is very much influenced by the transitoriness of its materiality, and throughout her life she welcomes these elements of improvisation. The makeshift shacks that spring up in Stuttgart in the late 1940s actually agree more with her than the solid houses that speak of security and permanence. When she moves to Berlin, it is exactly this characteristic of the city that appeals to her. "I loved Berlin, for its vitality and its incompleteness. There was such a desire to make use, to build from this jumble something altogether new. Everything was experiment" (BN118).

In Belfast, Raymond's experience of the urban resembles that of Ilse, as he too lives in a place whose very materiality changes constantly. The bombing campaigns of the Troubles on the one hand, and the citizens' efforts to rebuild the city on the other hand, account for this (BN 140). In his recollections Raymond

displays his appreciation for the people of Belfast. Already as a child he is aware of the multitude of individuals that form the urbanity. “The city had seemed such a generous place that it could accommodate so much life” (BN 92). He feels great affection for his fellow citizens, exhibiting the unrestricted humanity, which becomes apparent again and again in Patterson’s novels, during a visit to the hospital.

Raymond heard the murmured conversation and from further down the corridor other voices, coughs, a toddler crying. All those people sitting behind the curtains each with their unique flag on their arm... He burned with something he could not understand, but thought must be sadness because it made him want to cry. (It was not until many years afterwards, when the first photograph of May holding the baby was brought to him in his cell, that he recognised this feeling for what it was, which was love.) (BN 93)

Finally, Sam experiences in Paris the elating chaos and numerous human encounters any city offers. Further enhanced by the effect of the drugs he has been taking, the French capital presents itself to Sam’s consciousness as an intricate material network on the one hand and a web of lives on the other. Making sense of its “complex circuitry” (BN 146) on a material level, Sam revels in this close proximity to Paris citizens and hungrily drinks in fleeting points of contact such as described in the following quote, but also more substantial encounters, anything from lengthy conversations to passionate sex with strangers.

Outside again, walking, *walking*, the street seemed a place of infinite refuge. Freed from his former quest, he bobbed along the sidewalks, head turned this way and that by the rain on the glasses of a passer-by – a patterned umbrella – an interesting hat – a fleeting smell of perfume or pipe smoke. So many people. His head whirled with their variousness, his mouth pulled a grin and held it till his chilled lips cracked and bled. (BN 164)

Sam’s experiences fit perfectly into the pattern that has formed in his head. In his paranoid state of mind the young man reads significance into everything that happens to him, drawing connections until he sees a complex web of interactions that leads him towards Ilse, Raymond and Big Thunder Mountain. In Sam’s narrative the novel plays with the human urge to make sense of the innumerable experiences and encounters that happen to us, and for which cities, their



heterogeneity and multitude are the ideal settings. The perception of this chaos alters the perception of the urban per se. “Coincidence is the city’s fourth dimension. Coincidences are pearls we collect and string together” (BN 199). Ultimately Sam’s obsession with patterns illustrates the very subjective imagination of the city. “You get the city you project” (BN 199). Every city can be represented in many different ways according to how people perceive it. And while the numerous individual narratives included in the novel speak of this multitude of representations, they also show certain characteristics that Patterson ascribes to all urban spaces. *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*, like his other texts, speaks of cities as complex, changing and living entities.

The urban makes its last appearance again in Glenn Patterson’s most recent novel to date. Already on a paratextual level *The Third Party* anticipates an engagement with the city, as a neon-lit and highly populated city square adorns the cover. The setting of the narrative itself within the centre of Hiroshima enables Patterson to adopt an outside viewpoint. His protagonist and first-person narrator experiences the Japanese city as a tourist, exploring its main squares and shopping precincts, walking down its streets and alleys and puzzling over the public transport system. The main focus here lies on the representation of Hiroshima as a complex urban network and postmodern consumer society. An agglomeration of department stores constitutes the central meeting point for Hiroshima’s population and the protagonist repeatedly begins and ends his forays into the city in it. “I had been in these stores any number of times since my arrival in Hiroshima and still got so lost in their interconnecting walkways that occasionally I had to make for the street and start all over again” (TTP 37). Indeed the maze-like shopping complex almost passes for a city in its own right. “Akimi said, only a touch too well rehearsed, that was how she liked to think of the stores: a Small World of their own” (TTP 38). Within this world the protagonist acts as a visitor and observer, fulfilling the role of the flaneur and looking at Hiroshima from a vantage point that Pike describes as “a marvellous vehicle for conveying complexity” (35) in the city:

I strolled back to the hotel with my presents, the route taking me one last time along a stretch of Hondori Arcade, which ran from close to the Peace Park in the east, to the Parco department store, three-quarter of a mile to the west. Today as every day, it was teeming with shoppers. Today, as every day, the din beneath its high arched roof was tremendous. (To look up at the ribs of that roof was to see the whale from the plankton's point of view.) (TTP 63)

As always Patterson takes care to include a sense of the materiality of the city in combination with the image of Hiroshima as a place filled with people. The citizens do not only play a central role in bringing the urbanity to life, as do the masses of shoppers in the quote above, they also help the protagonist to relate to his surroundings on a social level. In the many instances in which he observes the people around him, the narrator's tale establishes interconnections between himself and them. Rather than focusing on the differences, his descriptions highlight unifying elements of humanity. It does not matter that he does not speak the language. He can still interpret their gestures and search for familiar notions in their faces.

A father and son sat across from me, in matching white and red Hiroshima Carp baseball jackets, silently working their way through their own platters of noodles. The boy was maybe eleven. His cheeks might have been roughed. Something in the way his diaphragm moved between wallows, I got the impression that he was asthmatic. I got the impression that he felt he fell short of his father's hopes for him.

The elderly woman next to me left, a younger woman took her place. She wore the white mask of the hay-fever sufferer and was talking through it on her mobile phone. She listened a moment, the mask creasing a though in a smile, then got up again before she had placed her order, before I could discover whether the mask was capable of eating as well as expressing emotion. (TTP 40-1)

*The Third Party's* protagonist observes and appreciates numerous encounters during that one day which frames the narrative temporally. Brief eye contact with an attractive woman in the A-bomb museum sends his imagination into overdrive, and he instantly considers the possibility of an affair, reading her relationship to her companion on the basis of his observations. Amongst people and the heterogeneous manifestations of the living city the protagonist feels safe. However, this feeling turns into uncertainty as soon as he leaves the urban behind. During a drive to a viewing point outside of Hiroshima his discomfort grows with the distance he puts between himself and the city centre:

The mountain might not have looked like much from my hotel room, but through the gaps between the houses the city appeared suddenly diminished and depopulated. Only motor vehicles caught the eye: buses, taxis, Hiroshima's endless variations on the tram genus. Up here, too, things had a stripped-down look. First footpaths went, then front yards. Washing flapped its arms close to the roadside. A family of trainers – daddy, mummy, two baby pairs – aired on the low wall next to a vending machine (for there were no shops now either). And still we climbed, beyond the line of the houses, with only the inevitable cherry blossom for company and in places not even that, just a rail between us and the tumbling undergrowth. I had a moment, realising we had not seen another car ahead of us since the road works, when panic threaten to overwhelm me. I thought I would have to ask Tadao to stop and let me out of the car, of whatever it was I had stumbled into here. Then, suddenly, round another bend, there was a car park, two-thirds full. There were snack carts, Portaloos. There were people. (TTP 25)

Apart from the people visiting it, the viewing point provides a further connection to the city in the perspective it grants the novel's characters of Hiroshima. Like from his top floor hotel where as soon as he opens the window "Hiroshima poured in, going for the ears and the nose" (TTP 69), the protagonist is afforded with a bird's eye view of the city. The change of perspectives as the protagonist travels through the city serves once again to establish its complexity and the multiple possibilities it entails. However, this particular image of contemporary Hiroshima as it presents itself from the perspective of the viewing point is supplemented by a historical dimension of the city. Fellow Belfast native Ike points it out as the view of the famous Holocaust painting, which depicts the inferno of the atomic bomb. Thus Hiroshima's past is introduced as an important element of the construction of the city. Throughout the novel the bombing and its effects feature repeatedly. The protagonist visits the A-bomb museum a total of three times, each trip revealing a new detail he has previously overlooked. As with the contemporary representation of the city, the fates of Hiroshima's people features heavily. He is spellbound by an information panel on a young victim and wonders about the origins of pieces of clothing exhibited. Outside the museum links between the past and the present are established through buildings and place names. The bank building that famously survived the inferno remains a prominent landmark in the contemporary narrative. The image of the clocks that stopped at the time of the air raid is mirrored in the clock that serves as a central meeting point in the shopping

complex. Thus, in *The Third Party* Patterson not only frames his story in an urban environment again, but he also includes elements of the spatial, social and the historical to establish the city, as he has done in all the novels he has written.

Patterson's entire body of work represents the city as a complex construct, alive with its inhabitants and changing throughout time. In this thesis I have analysed how he achieves such a plural and flexible representation of Belfast. The Northern Irish capital constitutes the 'centre of gravity' for the writer and reappears in some form in all of his novels. In *Fat Lad*, *The International*, *Number 5* and *That Which Was* especially he elevates the city to a character in its own right and represents its multi-dimensional character with great intensity. His spatial, social and temporal images combine to create a place that resonates with countless stories. Unlike the predominant mode of Northern Irish representation, the Troubles do not dominate these texts, but simply form one aspect of many that make up Belfast. Patterson's city cannot be reduced to one grand narrative. Instead the writer revels in its multiplicity and inexhaustible number of interconnecting micronarratives, which he depicts in the extraordinary ordinariness of everyday life. His city does not stand still but constitutes an ever-evolving progress, an event shaped by and shaping the people living within it. Patterson incorporates a relational and flexible definition of spatiality in his novels. This idea of the term receives attention in theoretical writings on the spatial turn. Edward W. Soja emphasises the trialectics of the spatial, the social and the temporal and in connection points towards a deconstruction of binary thinking. Doreen Massey establishes similar relationships and writes against dichotomous dualisms. These aspects of space have been central in the main analysis, as I have applied them to Patterson's urban image. Thus this thesis fits into a development in the academic discussion of (Northern) Irish literature that in recent years has increasingly recognized the importance of space (Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* 22). Patterson, however, has exhibited an intense preoccupation with urban spatiality as a multidimensional and shifting complex for more than two decades. In his novels Belfast has become a contemporary complex that feeds on a sense of uncompromising humanity and liberating plurality. To say it in the words of Louis

McNeice, one of his favourite poets (“Get Writing NI: Louis MacNiece”): It feeds on “the drunkenness of things being various” (extract from “Snow”, 18).

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